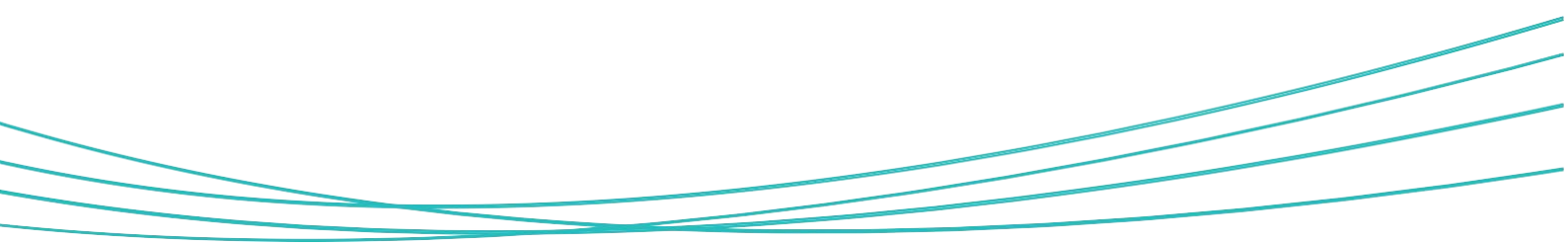




Y Coleg Cymunedol Cenedlaethol
a Mudiad Gwirfoddol
The National Community College
and Voluntary Movement

**Senedd Children, Young People and Education Committee Consultation: Tertiary
Education and Research (Wales) Bill**

26 November 2021



Summary

1. Addysg Oedolion Cymru | Adult Learning Wales (AOC | ALW) is in broad support of the proposed Bill. In submitting our response to the Committee, we are seeking to strengthen the provisions within the draft to ensure that Adult Community Learning (ACL) is properly considered, managed and represented within the post-16 compulsory education and training sector. ACL plays a vital role in supporting individuals on their journey to learn skills to enter, return or progress into employment and further learning. It also promotes active citizenship and reduces loneliness and makes people happier, healthier, more confident, capable, and resilient. Which in turn means that people are less reliant on health and social services, and less likely to enter or return to the criminal justice system

The role of adult community learning and lifelong

2. AOC | ALW seeks greater clarity on the Bill's intentions with regard to the balance of adult learning aimed at attaining qualifications and more informal or non-accredited learning.

Equity of ACL funding and provision

3. AOC | ALW seeks clarification on the plans to establish a national strategic body to oversee community based adult learning in Wales which will be funded, monitored and quality-assured by CTER as set out in the Ministerial statement of 12 July 2019.
4. AOC | ALW is the largest provider of adult community learning in Wales delivering 50% of the total ACL provision across a range of curriculum from pre-entry level to professional qualifications. We urge the Committee to revisit our proposals and to consider our appointment as the national body and adopt our strategic partnership model: [A model for success](#).

Education and training for “eligible persons over 19”

5. It appears that this legislation would give a statutory right to education (in the same way as 16-18 persons) to certain categories of adult learners. AOC | ALW is well placed to work with the Commission to define these learners and ensure they are funded, and we would like assurance that applications will be sought from the ACL sector for membership on the Commission and its committees in determining these regulations.

Representation

6. The Bill refers to consultation arrangements by the Commission or Welsh Ministers on codes, plans or further regulations. Further clarity should be provided setting out representative groups and how this translates to consultation and representation arrangements. Ensuring that there is a broad cross-section of representatives from the post-16 sector, including Adult and Community Learning and consideration of the make up of the Commission itself is crucial.
7. Our concern is that ACL could potentially be “lost” in the sweeping changes affecting FE and HE, and that ACL could be seen as a “bolt on” and less important in the whole debate. ACL is a vital, valuable, and integral part of the post-16 sector and should be given just and equitable status.

Our response

8. Addysg Oedolion Cymru | Adult Learning Wales (AOC|ALW) is the National Community College and Voluntary Movement for adult community learning in Wales and came into being in 2015 following the merger between the Workers Educational Association (WEA) Cymru and the YMCA Wales Community College. With over 100 years' experience of providing high quality adult community learning and advocacy throughout Wales, we are largest provider of pre-entry level to professional qualifications delivering 50% of all ACL provision. The organisation is committed to helping individuals to realise their potential and making communities more resilient in times of change.

Introduction

9. Put simply, ACL transforms people's lives, and in some instances, people have told us that it actually saves lives. As the COVID-19 crisis continues to grip our communities, it is a more important lifeline than ever before. It is the cornerstone of adult learning. Without it, many of the 60,000 learning activities undertaken each year by thousands of adults across Wales – including some of our hardest to reach, vulnerable or isolated citizens – would not progress into further learning and work or be able to cope with what life throws at them.
10. Delivering a range of informal and formal learning from pre-entry level courses to professional qualifications, as well as employability support, family learning and confidence-boosting programmes in a range of community and online settings, ACL gives people a first, second, third or even fourth chance to access learning.
11. Some adults find the prospect of entering more traditional campus-based settings and mixing with thousands of young people too daunting. Providing accessible and flexible face-to-face, blended, or online learning in communities, often through partnerships where relationships are already established and trusted provides the gateway needed for many adults to engage positively with their learning journey. The ability to provide flexible programmes which can be switched on and off when required, through versatile delivery arrangements, flexible and affordable staff contracts, and ensuring a wrap-around service that goes beyond the classroom to deliver extensive pastoral care to support vulnerable adults is what makes adult community learning unique.
12. The emphasis on collaboration across a wide range of partnerships, meeting local and regional needs, makes ACL a vital contributor to the skills agenda for Wales. ACL brings a wide range of ACL providers and key stake holders together including national bodies such as Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and the Open University in Wales, together with regional skills partnerships, Jobcentre plus, FE and HE providers and the Third Sector. Together, the ACL sector delivers provision in a learner focussed and progressive way. However, it is not without its challenges and limitations, and the call for a national strategic body to oversee ACL in Wales has never been more important to ensure a consistent and equitable offer for all.
13. In examining the provisions of the Bill, we would like to offer the following comments:

The role of adult community learning and lifelong learning

14. There appears to be strong emphasis on qualification-based education for adults as defined in the draft legislation as criteria for the promotion of life-long learning, including access to the “provision of proper facilities” for “eligible persons over 19”.
15. It is important to note that whilst accredited and qualification-based learning is very important and accounts for around 80% of our provision, there are strong arguments which advocate the benefits of non-accredited, engagement-type activities (also known as “hook courses”) to aid learners’ wellbeing and providing for that important step back into learning.
16. A combination of approaches to include a wide range of outcomes offered in ACL has a key role to play for both the individual and Wales through:
 - economic wellbeing by, for example, increasing people’s essential skills, supporting re-engagement with and progression in education and training and enabling the acquisition of vocational skills in areas like youth and community work, which contributes to lower levels of unemployment and economic inactivity and supports increases in productivity and progression to more highly skilled and paid work;
 - social wellbeing by, for example, supporting people’s integration and social inclusion, through the acquisition of language and essential skills, increases in employability and the expansion of social networks and by promoting active citizenship by enhancing people’s understanding of the issues that they and their communities face and their capability (such as their skills and confidence) to take action; and
 - physical and mental wellbeing by, for example, supporting pro-health attitudes and behaviours, increasing health literacy and engagement with health services (including social prescribing), and enhancing resilience and people’s sense of purpose and enjoyment of life.
17. ACL therefore makes an important contribution to a number of Wales’s wellbeing goals, including a more prosperous, healthier and more equal Wales with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language (WG, 2015). However, its contribution to the Welsh language is limited by the few opportunities to continue learning through the medium of Welsh within the sector (Estyn 2016). #
18. In light of the above, AOC | ALW seeks greater clarity on the Bill’s intentions with regard to the balance of adult learning aimed at attaining qualifications and more informal or non-accredited learning.

Equity of ACL funding and provision

19. In her written statement dated 12 July 2019, former Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams set out plans for the restructuring of “community based adult learning” in Wales. The actions to be taken forward are to “address immediate problems of equity of funding and provision”, and “provide a stronger foundation on which to develop a national strategic body which has a strategic overview

of community based adult learning across Wales and can ensure a consistent and equitable offer for all”.

20. The statement also confirms that the National Body “will be funded, monitored, and quality assured by the CTER in accordance with the proposals for all other FEIs”.
21. Given the absence of any reference to the National Body within the Bill, we are seeking clarification on the plans to establish such a Body, and the timescales being considered.
22. AOC | ALW is the National College and Voluntary Movement for Adult Community Learning in Wales, and is at the forefront of ACL research, provision and advocacy. We would highlight our submission to Welsh Government officials in 2018 which proposes our appointment as the National Strategic Body and the introduction of our “Strategic Body Partnership Model: [A Model for Success](#)”
23. The intention is to provide a framework for transformational change within the ACL Sector. Working with providers and ACL partnerships, the fundamental principle is that change would be built on trust and informed by delivery performance.
24. Key features of our proposals:
 - There would be one single contract from Government with the Strategic Body for Adult Community Learning in Wales.
 - The sole purpose of the contract holder (AOC|ALW) would be to deliver the adult community learning offer to the strategic objectives agreed with Welsh Government.
 - All parties would retain current direct delivery and in years 1-2, AOC|ALW would be charged with strategic planning and commissioning of partnership delivery.
 - We would build on existing support infrastructures involving the necessary specialist agencies such as Careers Wales and the Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) to ensure the availability of information and supporting the planning of learning and career progression.
 - Any future procurement for years 3 onwards would be performance related and based on quality and impact criteria.
 - Future delivery would be through multiple partnerships, using a procurement process that is based on a comprehensive delivery plan, performance management, capacity and capability building.
 - AOC|ALW would retain ultimate responsibility for all aspects of the contracted provision and would have a legally binding contract with each of its partners, ensuring visibility and transparency of objectives and impact.
 - Under the umbrella of the CTER, years 1-2 would be used to establish and model governance and management systems and processes.
25. AOC | ALW is the largest provider of adult community learning in Wales delivering 50% of the total ACL provision across a range of curriculum from pre-entry level to professional qualifications. We urge the Committee to revisit our proposals and to consider our appointment as the national body and adopt our strategic partnership model: [A model for success](#).

Education and training for “eligible persons over 19”

26. The Explanatory Memorandum is helpful in setting out some of the detail concerning eligibility criteria and proper facilities. In our view, the process to draw up regulations which clearly define this section of the Bill requires the input of specialist knowledge and expertise from the adult community learning sector, in order that decisions are informed and meet the needs of communities in Wales.
27. It appears that this legislation would give a statutory right to education (in the same way as 16-18 persons) to certain categories of adult learners. AOC|ALW is well placed to work with the Commission to define these learners and ensure they were funded, and we would like assurance that applications will be sought from the ACL sector for membership on the Commission and its committees in determining these regulations.

Representation

28. The Bill refers to consultation arrangements by the Commission or Welsh Ministers on codes, plans or further regulations. Further clarity should be provided setting out representative groups and how this translates to consultation and representation arrangements. Ensuring that there is a broad cross-section of representatives from the post-16 sector, including Adult and Community Learning and consideration of the make up of the Commission itself is crucial.
29. Our concern is that ACL could potentially be “lost” in the sweeping changes affecting School Six Forms, FE and HE, and that ACL could be seen as a “bolt on” and less important in the whole debate. ACL is a vital, valuable and integral part of the post-16 sector and should be given just and equitable status.

Conclusion

30. AOC | ALW welcomes the introduction of the Bill and is keen to support its implementation. Our support is based on the need to ensure ACL is properly represented and given credit for the important contribution it makes in creating healthy and prosperous communities through the personal, social and economic benefits that ACL provides. There is a well researched and evidence based need to establish a national strategic body under the umbrella of CTER, and we have put forward clear and coherent proposals which see us at the forefront of delivering this remit. We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the hearings held by the Committee and hope to continue to be an integral part of the formal constitutional make up of the Commission and its Committees.

Addysg Oedolion Cymru | Adult Learning Wales

31. With around 25,000 enrolments annually across the whole of Wales, and the largest provider of ACL, AOC | ALW is committed to providing wide-ranging learning, skills and qualifications, made up of formal and informal learning activities. These include employability skills, digital literacy, essential skills, family learning and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The

organisation also provides higher level qualifications in Counselling, Award in Education and Training (AET), Youth and Playwork and has a national programme of curriculum delivery linked to the Wales Trades Unions and many partners and employers. The curriculum is delivered through a range of online, blended and face-to-face learning.

32. As a membership organisation our Voluntary Movement promotes advocacy work through our members, branches, volunteers, staff, partners, and other stakeholders. Raising important issues that affect the lives of families in Wales are part of our advocacy work, through campaigns, lobbying, research activities, consultation, and democratic engagement. Through our activities we aim to take a lead role in advancing active citizenship and supporting citizens rights and entitlements. Our strategic aims underpin the goals set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
33. The Organisation specialises in reaching out to the most disadvantaged in society, and through strong partnerships, we have developed effective networking and community links to support communities throughout Wales. As a bilingual organisation, committed to promoting and advancing the Welsh language, the vision is to provide equal access to Welsh medium curriculum. We are keen to develop our international links, and are developing a framework for participation in the Welsh Government's International Exchange Programme which is due to commence in 2022 and is being managed by Cardiff University.
34. The Organisation actively works with local and regional communities and workplaces to promote learning opportunities and advocacy for community cohesion, personal development, and social inclusion. The curriculum offer is delivered through a range of stakeholder groups, including partners, employers, volunteers, and members. The combination of learning and advocacy has many benefits, including progression, employment, active citizenship and improved health and wellbeing. The work is impactful resulting in economic, social, and personal benefits which supports healthy and prosperous societies – this is the organisation's ultimate goal.