



**Adult Community Learning  
Merthyr Tydfil**

***Area Strategy  
Summary of the  
Strategic Priorities***

*June 2013 - May 2016*

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# **Merthyr Tydfil Adult and Community Learning (ACL) Area Strategy 2013– 2016**

## **1. Introduction / Background**

Merthyr Tydfil's Adult Community Learning (ACL) Partnership in 2009 was proactive in setting out the area's priorities for improvement in a comprehensive strategy. The ACL partnership set itself ambitious targets and actions, which were principally aimed at:

- Improving skills for work
- Improving skills for well being and social inclusion
- Improving communication skills and working with numbers
- Encouraging learning for active citizenship and community development
- Strengthening partnership working to ensure continuous improvement

This document acknowledges that the Merthyr Tydfil ACL partnership has had a number of successes over the past 4 years in achieving its goals set out in the 2009 strategy. However, the partners also recognises that with the introduction of the Child Poverty Strategy and the Families First programme together with the restructuring of the Community First programme and the impact of Welfare reform, there was a need to re-evaluate the overall strategic approach and develop a comprehensive strategic plan for each priority area.

The ACL partnership recognises that it could not/should not rely entirely on investment in schools to remove the educational challenges that Merthyr Tydfil face and that family and community approaches must be supported, advocated and extended. The ACL partnership acknowledges the 'Think Family' approach which has been adopted by Merthyr Tydfil Single Partnership is critical to improving personal, social, educational and economic outcomes of vulnerable families across the county borough.

## 2. The Need for a Strategy

Within Merthyr Tydfil there continues to be a commitment to providing learning opportunities for everyone through all stages in their life. Creating a culture in which learning is valued is very important for any community, irrespective of whether learning takes place in a classroom setting, an activity in the outdoors, or as a project in a community group.

In order to create a culture of valuing learning, the ACL network needs to ensure that its energy and resources are used to maximum effect, reducing duplication, planning learning activity based on community need and sharing resources wherever possible. In short, ACL needs to respond to the changing needs of the community by making learning relevant to an individual's need and also supports key initiatives and policy developments in an efficient and effective way.

Recognising the stages of the learning journey is important to the strategic directions for Merthyr Tydfil. All providers appreciate that linked to the different stages of the learning journey there are different support needs for an individual to achieve their goals. Learning, in this field will be viewed in terms the subject learning and the personal support required. An individual can easily enter “the system” at different stages and appropriate provision and support will need to be available. The different stages are identified below.

### Stages of learning

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5
Engagement & encouragement (utilising a range of providers, partners eg Communities First)	Confidence building – recognising existing skills, planning for the future	Bite size learning –  Non accredited. Learning incorporates resilience and motivation	Commitment to accredited learning package – either main stream provision such as basic skills or other type of learning	Progression to other learning opportunities, volunteering or employment

Each lead organisation responsible for the progression of the individual strategic priorities will coordinate development plans which will consider the 5 stages of learning detailed above.

### **3. How has this strategy update been developed**

This strategy builds on the previous commitment to effective collaborative / partnership working by members of the Merthyr Tydfil's Adult Community Learning (ACL) Partnership. A number of workshops have been held where all partners reviewed progress against planned targets and considered the findings of the Area Partnership Self Assessment Report.

Each priority of the strategy will be subject to ongoing reviews and updates through the production and updating of individual strategic plans which will be based on the following:

- **Policy Research** – All relevant policies on a national, regional and local basis are considered and reviewed to ascertain the impact on ACL services, and what impact ACL should have
- **Local Research** - Data is continually captured and analysed on areas such as the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, Welsh Government Research papers, and needs analysis for the Single Integrated Plan together with the findings of the needs analysis of the Merthyr Tydfil Family First programme. Consideration has also been given to the research undertaken for the production of the Local Community First Plans and the learning participation rates identified through the annual SAR process
- **Literature Research** – Various relevant literature was collated and analysed which included, academic research, analysis of ACL inspections; curriculum reviews

#### **Some Key findings from research and inspections:**

- Better links needed between learning and job opportunities
- Improvements in basic/essential skills are a key priority

- There is a need to encourage greater participation and access through Welsh language courses and ESOL (English for speakers of other languages)
- There is a need to establish individual plans for Welsh language, ESOL and Information Technology agendas as previous process for seeking to integrated the priorities into other strategic aims became diluted with limited impact
- More opportunities are required for those with learning disabilities
- Mental and physical health can be improved through stimulated learning opportunities
- Outdoor learning provides a good environment for delivering health benefits
- Informal, non accredited learning programmes provide the catalyst for supporting an individual's well being and social inclusion
- Learning opportunities can help older people to maintain independence
- Learning for learning's sake keeps people motivated and active
- Poor essential skills will not only affect an individual's ability to secure employment but have a negative impact on health
- The terminology used and current assessment procedures may deter adults from pursuing essential skills support
- Community involvement would help agencies in developing needs led services
- Adult community learning supports social cohesion and intergenerational communication
- There is a need to continue to embed environmental sustainability ESDGC (Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship) throughout community learning activities
- There is a greater emphasis on joint planning and monitoring of ACL services
- The network needs to continue to improve systematic collection of data which should be utilised to identify trends and drive up performance
- ACL providers need to demonstrate that the services are developed and managed in conjunction with the learner's voice

## 4. Where are we now – What we have done

In 2005, only 65.4% of working aged adults (16-64) in Merthyr Tydfil was economically active. This compared with the Welsh average of 72.7% (+7.3%) and the UK average of 76.4% (+11%). In December 2012, the Merthyr Tydfil rates had substantially improved to 73.4% which is just below the Welsh average 73.5% and the UK average of 76.9% (3.4%) (Nomis 2013)<sup>1</sup>

Welsh Government (2013)<sup>2</sup> reported Merthyr Tydfil as having 13% of working aged adults with no qualifications compared with 10.6% Welsh average. Merthyr Tydfil percentage has decreased by 8.4% since 2008 (21.4%) which compares favourably with the Welsh average decrease of 4.3% (14.9%). This improvement has also seen Merthyr Tydfil improve from being the worst performing Welsh authority to currently being 18 out of 22 local authority areas.

Careers Wales (2012) reports that NEETs (not in education employment or training) figure for year 11 students has reduced from 7.8% (60) in 2008 to 6.2% (44) in 2012, representing a fall of 16. The percentage of year 11 pupils staying in education has increased slightly from 73% in 2008 to 77% in 2012. However, the figures represent a slight decrease in numbers of 24 from 561 to 537.

The percentage of pupils in Year 13 continuing in some form of full time education has decreased from 79.8% in 2008 to 77.3% in 2012; however the trend data for year 13 NEETs shows a steady decline from 8.3% in 2008 to 4.3% in 2012. (Careers Wales 2012)<sup>3</sup>

### **ACL Partnership contribution:**

- ✓ With the development of the Bridges into Work project, over 5500 work related qualifications have been gained with 793 learners being supported into employment between September 2009 and March 2013
- ✓ The data collected from the Area self assessment process indicated that the partnership enrolment increased by 104% in the first two years of the strategy

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<sup>1</sup> Nomis - Official Labour Market Statistics

<sup>2</sup> Welsh Government 2013 – Stats Wales Highest qualifications of working age adults by region and local authority

<sup>3</sup> Careers Wales – 2012 Pupil Destination Report

- ✓ In 2010 -11 completions was 90.5% and attainment 89.5% both results were above the National Comparators published by Welsh Government
- ✓ Between Oct 2009 and Oct 2012 a community based support network with 6 support workers being recruited. The workers have supported 1552 individuals who have been identified as having a barrier that has prevented them from gaining employment; 331 individuals have subsequently gained employment following the personal support
- ✓ In 2011 -12, 99 service users with mental health conditions completed and attained qualifications through delivery from the Venture Out and Growing to Succeed project
- ✓ Merthyr Tydfil ACL is the only local authority area in Wales to undertake the piloting / use of the Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment toolkit
- ✓ Just over 1900 people registered their attendance at ALW 2012 events. This is an increase of 486 compared to participation rates in 2011
- ✓ The Workers Educational Association's (WEA) work in global citizenship is sector leading and successfully obtained QIF funding to train development workers and key tutors
- ✓ Set up the ACL partnership Ffynnon web based performance management system which was a Welsh Government requirement. Merthyr Tydfil was one of the partners to complete the process and has been provided additional support to develop the system to become sector leading and disseminate good practice to other partnerships
- ✓ Awarded RSC Wales funding to pilot the use of new mobile technology in teaching basic skills in community settings and has subsequently informed the wider ACL networks



## **5. Merthyr Tydfil ACL overall ‘Vision Statement’ and ‘Priorities’**

The overall Vision for Adult Community Learning for Merthyr Tydfil is:

“Through partnership, the Community Learning network will create and sustain an environment where adults, young people and families have access to a range of learning opportunities, within community settings, which is relevant to their needs. These learning opportunities will be delivered to meet individual learning styles, therefore maximising a person’s potential and achieving a greater degree of independence and quality of life.”

The Adult Community Learning Partnership within Merthyr Tydfil focuses primarily on individuals 19 years of age and older, but can include those 16 – 18 and intergenerational learning where appropriate. This strategy contains a number of key priorities which is being progressed by individual partners through the production of individual action plans. These include:

### **Priority 1 – Improve the employability skills of Merthyr Tydfil residents**

Enable local people become to improve their chances of employment by developing qualifications and opportunities based on the needs of learners and employers.

### **Priority 2 – Improve individual’s communication and number skills**

Enable residents to develop skills to maximise their potential and achieve a greater degree of independence.

### **Priority 3 – Improve quality through partnership working**

To ensure high quality learning that meets the learning styles and needs of individuals and groups in order for them to achieve their set goals.

### **Priority 4 – Improve individuals understanding and skills of Welsh culture and language**

To support adults and families in developing an understanding of Welsh culture and promote the use of Welsh as a living language by providing learning opportunities in the community.

**Priority 5 - Ensure ESOL provision meets the need of learners**

Develop ESOL provision that meets the needs of learners and is in line with the findings and recommendations of the Welsh Government's review of ESOL provision.

**Priority 6- Improve the knowledge and skills of individuals through the use of technology**

To ensure the people that live, work and study in Merthyr Tydfil who want to be online can get online, do more on line and benefit from being from the advantages of being online.

**Priority 7 – Merthyr Tydfil residents improve health and wellbeing**

Enable residents to develop skills and improve knowledge so that they may enjoy a healthier, stimulated and enriched life.

## **6. STRATEGIC LINKS**

Links have been created by the Adult Community Learning partnership with the following strategic plans and programmes with the aim to progress the agreed priorities detailed in this plan:

- Single Integrated Plan
- Organisational Corporate / Strategic Plans
- Community First
- Family First
- Flying Start
- MTCBC Post Inspection Action Plan

## **7. FUNDING**

Adult and Community Learning in Merthyr Tydfil is supported through a variety of funding streams, often with diverse objectives. These include:

- Direct funding from the Welsh Government (e.g. Local Authority grant, Merthyr Tydfil College funding, University of South Wales funding)
- Grant funding (e.g. Communities First, Family First, Flying Start, Big Lottery Fund, Welsh Government)
- European funding
- Contracts from other sources

We will work to utilise revenue and capital funding streams to pursue opportunities that will enable us to meet the goals and objectives of this ACL Area Strategy.

## **8. Measuring the progress of the strategy**

The success of the Adult Community Learning Strategy 2013 - 2016 will be measured against Key Performance Indicators which will be detailed in the individual priority plans and jointly agreed by the ACL service providers within Merthyr Tydfil.

*Areas for monitoring and evaluation:*

- Access to Services
- Customer Views
- Delivery
- Partnership / Strategic
- Quality
- Use of resources

## 9. ACL Links to other Learning Agendas

Merthyr Tydfil ACL network acknowledges that its work through informal and formal learning provision supports the continual learning of individuals whether they are employed or unemployed, in full time education or in part time education. Listed below are just some of its links.

