



Adult Learning in Wales:

Consultation on the delivery and
funding structure of adult learning in
Wales

WLGA Consultation Response

September 2018



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Introduction

1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales. The three national park authorities and the three fire and rescue authorities are associate members.
2. It seeks to provide representation to local authorities within a policy framework that is underpinned by a commitment to local democracy and accountability. In doing so it must satisfy the priorities of our members and ensure that local public services are at the forefront of the debate on developing devolution in Wales and the communities we serve.
3. The WLGA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Welsh Government's publication *Adult Learning in Wales: Consultation on the delivery and funding structure of adult learning in Wales*. Consulting adult learners, families and the public on proposals to reform and improve the delivery and funding of community-based adult learning in Wales is very important and the current review is overdue but welcomed.

Background

4. This consultation exercise aligns with the Welsh Government's wider approach to reforming Post Compulsory Education and Training in Wales (PCET) and proposals to create Tertiary Education and Research Commission for Wales. WLGA set out its views on Professor Ellen Hazelkorn's report "[Towards 2030: A Framework for Building a World-Class Post-Compulsory Education System for Wales](#)" in its response to the Welsh Government's 2017 White Paper consultation. The WLGA supports much of Hazelkorn's analysis of post-compulsory age education and training in Wales and supports fully the aspiration to bring greater coherence and coordination to post-16 provision and the urgency of eliminating duplication and competition. The WLGA does not however support the creation of a single Commission to be responsible for the oversight, strategic direction and leadership of the Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) sector. These views were elaborated upon in the Association's response to the *Public Good and a Prosperous Wales - the next steps* in July 2018.
5. The WLGA's concerns about the Commission were that its approach had failed in the past and the WLGA sees no evidence to suggest that it will be more successful on this occasion. Between 2001 and 2006 the National Council for Education and Training for Wales (ELWa) attempted to create a national planning framework and funding formula for the PCET sector and failed in almost all its objectives. ELWa was criticised from the outset for a series of failures in financial management, poor risk management and organisational restructuring and was merged with the Welsh Government in 2006. Its functions were subsequently exercised by the Welsh Government and it took almost a decade to rectify the damage caused by the exercise. Returning to this failed approach after 8 years of austerity fills many in local government with deep anxiety.

6. The way that adult community learning is currently funded is a legacy of the failed arrangements established under ELWa. More recently, the reviews commissioned by the Welsh Government from Arad Research, entitled *A Review of Adult Community Learning in Wales*, and from Estyn, entitled *Adult Community Learning in Wales 2015-16* rightly highlighted the inequitable and unsustainable nature of the current funding and structure of adult learning in Wales.
7. The WLGA supports the need to revise and restructure the funding and planning of adult learning and supports broadly the aims set of by the Welsh Government that:
 - Provision must be consistent in terms of offer and quality for learners across Wales;
 - Provision that delivers the Welsh Government's priorities must be available to all learners across Wales, regardless of location or circumstance;
 - The funding methodology must enable funding to be focused on those in greatest need of our help, and support providers to deliver a curriculum that helps people back into learning and targets the eradication of poverty;
 - The system must facilitate more strategic and sustainable planning of provision to ensure we can achieve long term positive impacts from our investment.
8. The Association also supports the alignment of any future approach with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 and other national strategic policies.

Current Developments

9. The WLGA has argued in relation to PCET reform that post-16 provision should be organised within a democratic framework with local accountability. It is based on the WLGA's view that decisions about how services are planned, funded and managed should be taken as close to the point of delivery as possible or practical. The Association believes that the same principles should apply to adult learning.
10. The Association recognises the role of the Welsh Government in setting the overall strategy for adult and community learning and that local authorities should plan and deliver provision within that wider strategic context the priorities set out within the *Adult Learning for Wales* policy statement.
11. The WLGA believes firmly that local authorities are best placed to plan and deliver adult learning taking account of local circumstances within their communities. This would not preclude working in partnership with other providers, but local authorities should take the lead role in planning and where appropriate in delivery. The Association opposes the creation of a single national strategic body to oversee the strategic planning and delivery of adult learning for the reasons already mentioned.

Funding Adult Learning in Wales

12. The WLGA supports the view that that a new methodology is required to allocate funding for adult learning in a more constructive and even-handed way. Local authority budgets have suffered significant cuts during almost 10 years of austerity and adult learning has suffered further by the absence of a coordinated and strategic approach to funding.
13. With regards to the funding options set out in the consultation document, the WLGA's clear preference is for Option D and the transfer of adult community learning funding into the Revenue Support Grant. The Association believes that councils are best placed to make decisions about how such funding is allocated within their communities, taking account of local circumstances and need. Once in the RSG, the funding would be subject to democratic scrutiny and accountability thus ensuring that funding was allocated where appropriate. Distribution issues could be discussed through the Distribution Sub-Group but it is essential that the appropriate quantum of funding is transferred into the RSG. This area of service has traditionally been underfunded and the current level of Community Learning Grant is totally inadequate.

Conclusion

14. The WLGA welcomes this consultation on the delivery and structure of adult learning in Wales. The Association believes that responsibility for the planning and delivery of adult learning should be returned to local authorities and the appropriate level of funding should be transferred into the RSG. The WLGA shares the Welsh Government's vision of "a Wales where learning is at the core of all we do; where participation in learning is encouraged and rewarded; and where people have equal opportunities to gain the skills for life and work that they need to prosper."

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