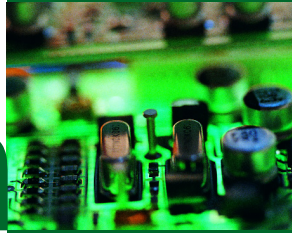




Community University of the Valleys Partnership



aiming high

Developing Community e-Learning

Guidance
for Partners





The **Community University of the Valleys Partnership** is a unique partnership between the Higher Education and Voluntary sectors in the West Wales & The Valleys Region, working to develop appropriate community based learning opportunities. The partnership aims to widen participation in higher learning by bringing learning closer to home and by making it more relevant to all parts of our communities.

Partners Contributing to this Guide

Amman Valley Enterprise
Blaenymaes Portmead & Penplas Development Trust
Bryncynon Community Strategy
Catapult, Tredgar Development Trust
City & County of Swansea Lifelong Learning
Dove Workshop Banwen
Glynneath Training Centre
Menter Cwm Gwendraeth
Penydre High School Merthyr Tydfil
Rhondda Cynon Taff CBC Lifelong Learning
Rise Learning Network
The Open University in Wales
Telecentre & Business School Porth
University of Glamorgan
University of Wales Swansea
University of Wales Newport
Workers Educational Association South Wales

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CUV Partnership

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Message of Support from the **CUV Partnership's Planning Group**

“Lifelong learning has grown into an educational giant, and figures in just about every widening access policy initiative. To make it a reality universities and community organisations must avoid empty partnerships; they must strive instead for a genuine sharing of their resources, teachers and learners. The CUV partnership is doing just this through devising imaginative courses, designing alternative assessment strategies, and welcoming people who would not otherwise engage in learning. In this handbook a series of invaluable principles and guidelines are proposed. They serve as a model for good practice and a reminder for all concerned when it comes to promoting our core educational values: learning for life, learning for work, learning for all.”

Prof. Colin Trotman - Head of Department of Adult Continuing Education,
University of Wales swansea

Prof. Danny Saunders - Head of centre for Lifelong Learning, University of Glamorgan

Mrs Jan MacCallum - Glynneath Training Centre on behalf of Community Partners

Mr Viv Davies - Head of centre for Community and Lifelong Learning,
University of Wales, Newport

Dr. Heather Graham - Director, The Open University in Wales



GLOSSARY

asynchronous	interaction occurs intermittently with a time delay. Examples are Questions & Answers mentoring, on-line discussion groups, and email
chat	real time on-line text communication
digital literacy	the ability to access, understand, evaluate and integrate information via computer and the Internet
e-learning tools	information and communications technology (ICT) used to facilitate and support learning
discussion forums /boards	forums on the Internet or an intranet where users can post messages for others to read
handheld devices	a device, which is small enough to fit in one hand and can have the ability of using wireless technology for browsing Web contents. A handheld device must have these three characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • operate without cables • easy to use in one's hands, not resting on a table or desk • allow addition of application or support Internet connectivity
hardware	the physical and electronic parts of a computer
messenger	live chat tool, such as msn or yahoo
software	a set of instructions that tell a computer what to do; a program
synchronous	a real-time, on-line event in which all participants are logged on at the same time and communicate directly with each other. In most platforms, users can use a whiteboard to see work in progress and share knowledge. Interaction may also occur via audio - or videoconferencing, Internet telephony, or two-way live broadcasts
video and/or audio-conferencing	using video and audio signals to link participants on-line at different and remote locations
virtual learning environment (vle)	a specific piece of software that enables learners and staff to interact, and includes content delivery and tracking. Most common vles are Blackboard, WebCT
webcam	video camera devices which connect directly to the PC for the purpose of video calling over the internet
weblogs	a "log" of the web - a diary-style site, in which the author (a "blogger") links to other web pages he or she finds interesting using entries posted in reverse chronological order
wiki	a web application that allows users to add content, as on an internet forum, but also allows anyone to edit the content



Community University of the Valleys Partnership

Aiming High

Developing Community e-Learning - Guidance for Partners

The Community University of the Valleys Partnership (CUVP) is committed to improving continually the quality of teaching and learning in order to help widen participation in learning and support progression to higher learning. The CUVP is working strategically to maximise resources for high quality community learning across the West Wales and Valleys area.

The partnership strongly advocates effective use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) within community learning and community regeneration strategies. Central to its ethos is a shared belief in the value of learner democracy and the importance of negotiating with learners and communities in developing community ICT resources and ICT skills training.

This guidance on good practice in developing community e-learning has been developed through a collaborative process and reflects the practice and experience of partner organisations. It is presented as a contribution to the process of improving quality and builds on the values and principles laid out in the CUV Partnership's Good Practice Guide 'Aiming High' * It is not an exhaustive statement and further examples of good practice are welcomed.

* For copies of 'Aiming High' and other CUVP good practice guides visit our website www.cuv.org.uk



e-Quality

Adult community learning has been greatly influenced in recent years by technological change. Not only are new skills required for the workplace, but wider access to new technologies and the internet are creating a new form of literacy which is impacting on all areas of our lives; home, work, leisure and learning.

The Internet and ICT offer many advantages to individuals and communities with respect communicating with others, accessing information and developing knowledge. Yet despite increases in Internet subscribers, large numbers continue to lose out on potential benefits through not having easy access to ICT or not seeing e-learning as relevant to their lives. There are many challenges, therefore, in developing community e-learning.

Using ICT technology to develop networked communities

Communities networked by ICT have the potential to do much more than offer opportunities to search for or share information on the worldwide web.

Developing a networked community can:

- enable communities to take ownership of their learning
- broaden and widen means of local communication and networking
- develop confidence and expertise in using the internet as producers as well as consumers of information and knowledge
- open up new social, leisure and work opportunities for local people
- provide a virtual space to communicate globally and to exchange experiences
- develop IT users who are aware of the benefits and pitfalls of ICT, such as inaccuracies of information



We believe effective networked communities are best achieved by providing:

- Accessible and up to date ICTs and broadband connections in community locations
- Supportive e-learning environments and technical support
- Balanced e-learning programmes, which include
 - Learning opportunities that give both learners and learning providers the necessary skills to use the communication technology effectively
 - Formal and informal e-learning courses
 - Training in Information Literacy - researching the net effectively and making sense of and validating information
- E-learning activity that has relevance to community life
- Opportunities for learners and learning providers to work in partnership



e-learning and online curriculum

It is unrealistic to expect learners in areas of social exclusion and economic disadvantage to engage with e-learning without addressing a possible lack of digital literacy. Strategies for e-learning must start by ensuring good access to quality ICT facilities, community courses to develop computing skills and community development activities to promote the benefits of using these new technologies. Without the skills to operate a PC the potential benefits of new ways of communicating and gaining knowledge become meaningless. Once people are familiar with using the technology, they might also become interested in finding out what else is available to them via the World Wide Web.



Activities such as a community e-magazine including the use of digital video, audio and photography for digital story-telling are good ways of creating an interest in producing online materials and engaging people with technology and learning.

As with more traditional forms of learning, it is important to negotiate with learners and community organisations so as to develop an online curriculum that is interesting, inspiring and of benefit to the individuals and communities in which they live. Currently, the most popular way of delivering e-learning is a mix of on-line and face to face learning, using a variety of technologies, such as video-conferencing, a virtual learning environment, tape, digital video and mobile and wireless technology.

New e-learners find this mixed approach less threatening in the change from traditional learning to online learning. It is best to offer informal e-learning activities to develop interest but equally important to offer more formal and accredited e-courses, to meet changing learner interest and skill demands.

This mixed approach also helps tutors adapt to new technologies and develop their knowledge of how e-learning approaches can enhance teaching and learning. ICT can provide easy access to on-line materials to support a particular subject or interest linked to their teaching. It can offer new ways to provide tutor and learner support, while communications tools, such as 'direct chat' and 'discussion boards' and the numerous weblogs and wikis that are currently developing worldwide can encourage links with people all over the world to exchange knowledge and experiences.



Skills for e-learning

There are many additional skills needed to study online in an effective way.

The following are key skills needed for online study:

- Basic literacy and basic IT skills (although use of text is not always necessary)
- Practical understanding of e-learning and e-support systems and procedures
- Practical skills and confidence in e-communication, e.g. chat, discussion boards, language etiquette, lack of body language; expressing ideas and communicating in different media; participating in different learning groups
- A certain level of independence, self-direction, time management
- Skill in effectively searching for information
- Skill in analysis and management of this information
- Skill in valuing and evaluating different perspectives



Developing community e-learning

Community e-learning strategies will benefit from:

- A negotiated, bottom up approach, working with community groups to identify learning aims and to develop appropriate provision
- A partnership approach, working with the range of learning providers and support services to avoid duplication and share resources for community benefit
- An informed approach, mapping out e-learning resources and initiatives and having a clear understanding of what can be developed locally



Community e-learners will benefit from:

Pre-Course -

Introductory Sessions on

- e-learning approaches and basic ICT skills
- how to access e-learning support
- how to search the internet

At Start of Course -

Awareness Sessions on:

- the course content, e-learning tools, e-learning aims, assessment processes etc
- the organisation and its procedures
- support resources and services
- disability support services

During the course -

Opportunities for:

- Learner/tutor reflection and course review
- academic support
- Non-academic support, e.g. administration, advice and guidance, technical support

Using ICT for learner support

Studying online can be an isolating experience for learners. Being cut off from other students, tutors and the learning institution can reduce the level and quality support for learning. Learners who fail to establish support networks are more likely to withdraw from study and open and distance learning courses often have high drop out rates. Much improvement can be achieved through ICT to enhance student support, both academic and non-academic.

We believe that learner support services can be improved by the effective use of ICT, as long as learners are assisted with developing ICT skills



Providers need to ensure:

- High quality, functional software e.g. good navigation, interactive learning environment, not just based on text.
- An e-support staff development strategy - all tutors and support staff need skills in the use of e-support and engaging and motivating learners
- A learner peer support strategy; cascading skills from experienced learners to new learners
- Equality and Access Strategy - making sure that the systems being developed are fully accessible for all users.

Technology can also be used to support traditional courses, especially if learners are dispersed or if the learning provider intends to create a 'community of learners' between students from different locations. The same skills are required as for a wholly on-line course, and the same issues as mentioned above need to be taken into account.



General Issues to keep in mind when developing e-support:

- It is more difficult to provide specialised support online than face to face
- Initially a lot of 'hand-holding' is required to engage learners with e-support
- A learner/mentor approach is good practice
- When developing new e-support, organise learner trials and develop systems for ongoing learner feedback.. This increases a sense of ownership and engagement.
- A 'glossary' section, explaining the terms and jargon is useful



Staff development to encourage the use of ICT and e-learning

When developing community e-learning, staff development will be required for tutors, who provide the learning opportunities, and for community workers and support staff, who can encourage earners to use ICT. These groups require assistance in gaining confidence and expertise in using the technology. A continuing professional development programme to encourage the use of technology for teaching and learning would include:

- Awareness raising on available technologies and on-line information resources for teaching and learning
 - for community workers
 - community tutors
 - academic staff
- Awareness raising on available on-line communication tools
- Accessible information on ICT resources and support
- Providing ICT equipment and setting time aside for staff to access the ICT
- Training sessions for frontline staff, community workers and tutors in the use of ICT to enhance their own day to day work
- Training session for all staff on how to use communication tools such as messenger, webcams, discussion boards
- Advice and support for staff to use ICT for their day to day work
- Training sessions on how e-learning materials can enhance traditional learning

It is important to bear in mind that providing online learning opportunities does not simply mean putting information on-line but is more about facilitating learning through the use of interactive communicative tools, such as discussion forums, chat, video conferencing.



All staff must feel at home in the online environment before they can act as effective promoters and supporters of e-learning.

Tutors and Community Workers can play a key role in promoting and developing e-learning skills by:

- Using different ICT media as learning tools, supporting course materials
- Designing and supporting learning activities that involve the use of ICT and encourage learners to use the internet for research
- Providing a learning environment that blends traditional and e-learning methods in which learners can progressively engage with e-learning
- Facilitating and supporting learners' in using new technologies



Providers will also need to ensure:

- Awareness of health and safety issues involved with using computers
- Availability of technical support during teaching hours

Good Practice in on-line teaching and learning

In every form of learning, whether in a traditional class room situation or online, there are three main concerns for the learner:

1. How the subject matter is presented by the tutor
2. How the learner builds knowledge and links the subject matter to what he/she already knows and the context of their life situations
3. How to communicate with others - learners, tutors, friends and family.



Examples of how effective use of technology can support and enhance these processes:

- Using a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) the tutor and learner can present and experience nearly any area of learning in interesting ways:
 - using video and audio
 - including presentations that link words, sound and pictures
 - making links to other sources of information and material
 - developing feedback forums
 - providing on-line self-assessment exercises
 - setting up online discussion forums
 - setting on-line activities and tasks to discuss and carry out in cooperation with their fellow students
 - providing feedback from tutors via forums and emails
 - developing conferencing facilities to direct synchronous one-to-one discussion, video and/or audio-conferencing
 - designing on-line information resources to support study, such as frequently asked questions, video-clips of tutorial discussion, examples of questions, comments and dialogues of previous learners
 - highlighting pathways to information and research materials that relevant to particular courses or subject areas
 - providing dedicated learner support services allowing easy access to course materials, communication with the tutor study support professionals and other learners, while on-line

Learners can also create their own 'learning-journey' by using the internet independently, taking part in discussion on sites chosen by them selves, following their own interest. The quantity and accessibility of information on the Internet might change the role of teachers from being the major providers of content, to facilitators of knowledge creation, ensuring learners acquire the skills to critically analyse the information.



The benefits of e-learning - researching best practice

e-learning is a relatively new approach to providing learning opportunities and may offer new solutions. It is however important to understand the online needs of learners and communities so that we can work towards making e-learning opportunities 'fit' local need.

In the context of the Community University of the Valleys Partnership the need to further research the following issues were identified:

- Which technologies are most effective in helping adults to access learning? ICTs, Digital Video, Video conferencing, Handheld devices, A community Virtual Learning Environment.
- How can the learning preferences and styles of different learners best be accommodated by using technology?
- Which design of virtual systems is most effective in attracting new learners?
- Which online teaching and learning and learning assessment strategies are best suited to the diversity of adult learners?
- How can we identify the specialised software and hardware to enhance accessibility for all?
- What is required to engage learners on-line?
- Which student support system works best for the diverse adult learner population?



It is important for community organisations and community learners to be part of any research team, directing research to meet their own needs and to move away from the culture of being researched. The CUVP actively promotes such an approach and aims to support the skills development of staff within community organisations and their capacity for research activity.



Community University of the Valleys Partnership

Mission Statement

We affirm our commitment to:

- i) devising continuing higher education strategies that will help address the issues of exclusion and deprivation and support the cultural, social and economic regeneration of the communities of the West Wales & Valleys area
- ii) providing innovative learning programmes and supportive guidance structures for those currently excluded and widen and increase access to learning by previously non-participating individuals and groups
- iii) supporting progression into higher education through the development of learning opportunities based on the broadest definition of lifelong learning - informal learning, non-accredited and accredited programmes
- iv) achieving agreements on mutual recognition of achievements and credits
- v) identifying and promoting good practice that emphasises community based, collaborative and student-centred learning and disseminating partnership experiences in community learning
- vi) developing structures that give learners and communities opportunities to participate as equal partners, to negotiate a curriculum suited to needs and to influence the development of appropriate learning programmes and support
- vii) affording equal status and mutual respect to all partnership representatives and recognising the importance of community groups not directly represented
- viii) supporting excellence in research on learning and communities, to inform developments
- ix) maximising appropriate resources across the partnership, through such strategies as joint funding bids, to develop integrated and innovative learning programmes
- x) ensuring that all partners communicate and respect each others activities to maximise synergy across the partnership
- xi) ensuring all partnership activities adhere to the principles of equal opportunities