



Community University of the Valleys Partnership

# aiming high

Engaging Communities with Learning

Guidance  
for Partners



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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

Cwmni Clydach Development Trust

Dove Workshop Banwen

Glynneath Training Centre

Gurnos and Galon Uchaf Regeneration

Menter Cwm Gwendraeth

Penrhys Partnership Rhondda

Penywaun Enterprise Partnership

Rise Learning Network

The Open University in Wales

Telecentre & Business School Porth

Tredegar Development Trust, Catapult Project

University of Glamorgan

University of Wales Newport

University of Wales Swansea

Workers Educational Association South Wales



#### CUV Partnership

c/o Dept of Adult and Continuing Education  
University of Wales Swansea  
Singleton Park, Swansea SA2 8PP



## Message of Support from the CUV Partnership 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



## Community University of the Valleys Partnership

# Aiming High

### Engaging Communities with 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 CUV Partnership is working strategically to maximise resources for high quality community learning across the West Wales and Valleys area.

The CUV Partnership strongly advocates the benefits of community learning and aims to develop accessible community learning opportunities at all levels, from informal to degree level, to meet community needs. Learning and the development of skills and experience can bring many social, economic and cultural benefits. It is important therefore not only to ensure that people are aware of local learning opportunities but also to develop approaches that empower individuals to participate and benefit from such opportunities. Effective promotion of community learning is really about facilitating community participation and enabling community engagement.

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

\* For information on other good practice guides in the CUV Partnership's 'Aiming High' series, visit the website [www.cuv.org.uk](http://www.cuv.org.uk)



## The Historical Context

Over many years in the West Wales and Valleys region there has been a strong history of volunteering and community action and a positive tradition of adult learning. The CUV Partnership celebrates this history and promotes successful models of engagement that have long been used by community learning and regeneration organisations, such as Glynneath Training Centre, The Dove Workshop, Amman Valley Enterprise and the Bryncynon Strategy.



It is an approach focused on valuing people, encouraging their learning and development and empowering them to take full advantage of opportunities. Such community regeneration organisations help make communities better places to live and provide a platform for people to contribute to the future sustainability of their local areas.



## Shared Values & Entitlements

The CUV Partnership believes that good quality community learning is a basic right/entitlement.

We support community learning approaches that are:

- ♦ **Accessible** - delivered at local venues and also accessible in terms of language and communication methods, teaching approaches, curriculum content, available technology, physical access to buildings and timing of courses
- ♦ **Participative** - enabling community members and learners to inform developments and participate in activities such as curriculum planning
- ♦ **Sustainable** - maximising available local resources by working in partnership with community stakeholders and the range of providers
- ♦ **Supportive** - providing helpful learning environments with services and facilities such as suitably skilled and trained staff, mentoring, guidance, childcare, help with fees, IT and library resources
- ♦ **Inclusive** - valuing diversity and promoting disability equality; challenging racism, sexism and other stereotypical assumptions about the needs of learners. Also taking account of low confidence by offering non-threatening user-friendly environments with additional resources such as crèches and community cafes
- ♦ **Appropriate** - offering learning that meets community and individual need and acknowledging the skills that people already have. Also taking account of the local job market and skill shortages
- ♦ **Progressive** - innovative and celebrating achievement; developing positive assessment methods and accessible progression routes



The CUV Partnership has identified 3 possible models of engaging communities with learning:

1. Community decides what courses are needed and works to bring in the appropriate learning by the appropriate learning provider/learning network or partnership
2. Learning Provider works in partnership with community organisations and negotiates courses for delivery
3. Learning Provider goes out to community and decides on course delivery

These are types of development activity that can take place within community learning. Engaging community learners can involve one or a combination of these approaches. Different situations will involve differing approaches with varying levels of negotiation and community or provider control. It is important to be an honest broker and to have a realistic approach to what can be achieved.

## Key Stakeholders

It is essential to recognise the range of key stakeholders when working to engage communities with learning.

These include internal and external stakeholders such as:

Learners

Community organisations

Learning Providers

Staff/Volunteers

Tutors

Funders

Policy Makers



## Engaging with Stakeholders

The CUV Partnership believes there is benefit in working collaboratively to advocate community learning at individual, organisational, community and national level. In taking this agenda forward, it will be crucial to engage with all stakeholders from learners through to policy makers to increase their understanding of the value of a community learning approach which advocates accessibility, flexibility and learner empowerment. In promoting shared values such as 'bringing learning closer to home', responding to community and learner needs and enabling equal partnership with communities, we can establish partnerships for negotiation that can help bring about change- both in the supply of and demand for learning.

## Barriers to learning and participation

Engaging with community learners is often about breaking down barriers presented by both learners and learning providers such as:

- Previous negative experience of education, low confidence and aspiration
- Perceptions of courses being culturally or gender specific
- Inappropriate curriculum and teaching methods
- Times and venues of courses and course fees

Engaging communities with learning is also about recognising that the communities we work in have limited resources and that economic regeneration and personal development go hand in hand. It will be important for stakeholders to negotiate mutual benefit; taking account of:

- Differing power relationships between organisations and between providers and learners
- Issues around hard to reach groups who are geographically or culturally isolated
- Communities often being reluctant to change



## Engaging communities with learning through community development

The CUV Partnership recognises the strong interrelation between lifelong learning, active citizenship and community renewal and believes that a community development approach helps facilitate engagement with community learning (see appendix 2)

In our experience, participation in learning makes a positive difference to communities. However, developing accessible and meaningful learning opportunities for adults who have not traditionally taken part is a complex process, demanding long term investment from a wide range of stakeholders. For effective community learning to take place, it will be important to ensure that the pillars and practice of community development are established.

*Such Community Learning approaches:*

- give people information, knowledge, skill and confidence; enabling them to make choices and address their own problems and needs
- develop peoples' skills through informal community activity which impacts upon the wider community
- support community development aims, raising peoples' aspirations, a willingness to volunteer and personally invest in their communities
- provide opportunities to negotiate and influence development of a curriculum that is flexible and adaptable to their needs/situation





## How to Engage Community Learners

Engaging communities with learning is a 'whole science' and is not just about promotions, advertisements and recruitment events. A wide range of resources need to be in place.

### *Tools for the Job*

To successfully engage communities with learning you need tools, such as:

**Key community workers and education development workers** with:

- Understanding of the local area and the target audience,
- A map of existing learning provision and support services
- Skill in developing relationships, negotiating and networking

**Skilled tutors/learner support workers** with -

- Ability to adapt/respond to varying needs
- Innovative approaches to breaking down barriers and ensuring retention

**Quality Learning Resources such as**

- Accessible buildings/learning centres
- Adequate and accessible learning materials and equipment such as ICT
- Appropriate curriculum that is relevant to peoples' lives

**Strategies to actively involve and empower learners**

- Learner consultation events, learner feedback systems, learner mentors
- Learner champions, learner forums, learner representation in planning



## A Step-by-Step Guide:

### Key Approaches

Partnership working

Community based/Community led

Grass Roots/Bottom Up

Negotiated Approach

Identifying and Responding to Need

Impartial, Person Centred Guidance

Informal Learning as First Steps

Adopting a long-term approach/not looking for quick fixes

Acknowledging that it takes at least 10-15 years for new developments to be fully accepted in any community



## Pre Development Phase

- Establish your Partnership/Steering Group - bringing in key stakeholders, local, regional, depending on needs/aims
- Agree a Development Strategy - 5 year/10 year, with a clear focus on sustainability
- Identify development resources or work to secure new start up funds - one project or series of linked projects
- Agree roles and responsibilities
- Agree lead organisation/s to manage administration/financial matters
- Agree monitoring, review and evaluation arrangements
- Appoint/elect a Strategy Manager or Chair to support the partnership



## First Steps

- ♦ Identify the targeted community area/s
- ♦ Assign an educational development worker (more if resources allow) as a support resource for each community area, tasked with the following:
  - Carrying out a detailed community mapping exercise, through personal contact and networking, to identify relevant community resources, existing learning provision and support agencies
  - Approaching all community stakeholders to map out resources, liaising with local people, community groups, voluntary sector organisations, government agencies and all educational providers - community, further and higher education
  - Identifying suitable existing venues/organisations interested in working in partnership to develop community learning
  - Holding community meetings with residents, learners, community workers and community groups to consult on development aims/start identifying needs
  - Facilitating the development of community forums/interest groups to champion the needs of different sectors
  - Helping to establish local partnership from the range of groups active in the community (voluntary and statutory) to steer developments in each community area or helping to consolidate an existing partnership group



- ♦ The involvement and support of community leaders will be a key element of the approach; development activities need to be inclusive and community led rather than imposed by agencies. The development worker should ideally be community based and supported by a key community organisation that can help with issues of developing trust and acceptance by the wider community
- ♦ It will be important not to re-invent the wheel - to work with organisations and initiatives who are already providing valued services 'on the ground'

## Capacity Building

Enable Community Workers/Leaders:

- ♦ Engage with key community groups and community leaders to identify learning needs
- ♦ Provide resources to develop customised local learning opportunities or to enable access to existing learning opportunities to meet identified capacity building needs e.g.
  - Introduction to community development - developing practical skills in community work
  - Leadership Skills
  - Business and Management skills - ICT, Finance, Funding, Accounting
  - Marketing and Promotion
  - Information, Advice and Counselling





### Enable the Wider Community:

- Undertake Community Learning Needs Analyses.  
A community questionnaire approach may be limiting as those who are not participating are unlikely to respond.

### Preferred approaches include:

- Facilitating groups of local people in researching the needs of specific groups or geographical areas, mentored by an experienced researcher.  
This approach has been very successful in some areas, with local people being more likely to gather accurate data. It also offers significant benefits for participants, in terms of increased confidence, community involvement and motivation to take up further learning.
- Enabling a group of staff/volunteers to survey community groups, such as mothers and toddlers, health & fitness clubs, using innovative and participatory methods to gather information on learning needs. Training for staff/volunteers to develop group work and community survey skills will be required. This approach will also raise awareness with community groups of potential learning opportunities and develop initial links for developing targeted taster courses and information days.
- Draw up a Community Learning Plan (with short and long term aims) and disseminate to key stakeholders and participants involved in the research and survey work for comment/validation/development.

### Assess/Develop Learning Infrastructure:

- Carry out an audit of learning facilities and resources within the community area, working with key stakeholders and the partnership



- Negotiate with partners to maximise the use of existing resources for the local community learning strategy - people, systems and places
- Agree a learning infrastructure development plan, if required particularly focused on ensuring good access to up to date ICT facilities

## Moving Forward/Longer Term Aims

Focus on maintaining and consolidating resources for partnership/steering group coordination and the educational development worker/s

- Agree strategies for developing learning opportunities that respond to identified community needs
- Work through the local partnership group to develop appropriate community access routes to learning
- Ensure partnership group includes representatives of all stakeholders, including learner representatives and the range of learning providers to maximise potential resources for local communities
- Develop a network of welcoming, accessible and well-resourced community learning centres, through the partnership of providers and resources (not necessarily new build/if there are existing centres better to enhance what already works)
- Work on developing a comprehensive programme of community learning with centres that offer a range of subjects and levels of learning through a range of providers
- Establish a strong community information and marketing strategy and provide a range of innovative, first step, informal learning opportunities to encourage take up. It is often the case that people are unaware of learning opportunities and lack the confidence, time or material



resources to take advantage of them. Many perceive learning as formal and irrelevant and something that other groups do. Making effective contact with those who may have negative previous experiences of learning is often challenging. Learning opportunities focused on skills that are quickly identified as useful, such as 'how to use a digital camera' are often popular first steps - people feel less worried about admitting that they need to learn IT skills

- ♦ Involve learners in developing and running promotional events and campaigns. Learners are best placed to promote learning and engage new learners
- ♦ Develop accessible progression routes to accredited opportunities in further and higher education, in the longer term, and develop appropriate community focused academic support structures, such as help with developing study skills. It may not be possible to deliver all learning in community settings but it will be important to develop community based learner support services to enable progression into college and university campus
- ♦ Provide accessible information and guidance services for learners at all stages of development, helping with learning choices and progression options
- ♦ Bring in other support services to the local partnership, such as welfare benefits, housing and disability advice. Barriers to learning are often a complex mix of social, economic and personal issues, needing the support of many agencies. Encouraging such services to hold regular surgeries in local learning centres can prove very beneficial



## Evaluation

- ♦ Regularly review the effectiveness of community learning strategies
- ♦ The type of evaluation activity will differ according to the particular activity being measured and the level of impact it has - on individuals, groups, communities etc.
- ♦ Seek regular feedback from learners and make sure this feeds into the planning and development processes. Use creative approaches such as focus groups, review workshops or learner days to gather not just course data but the wider learner experiences of personal development and what difference learning may have made to individuals, their families and communities
- ♦ Carry out timely surveys across the community areas to evaluate any wider social, cultural or economic impact. The guide 'Evaluating your community development activity' provides useful guidance on this\*



## Staff training

There are complex issues involved in engaging communities with learning and such work requires a very broad range of skills. It is very important therefore to develop appropriate local training opportunities for staff and volunteers from the community learning and community development sectors. Negotiation with community stakeholders and provider networks is one of the most important aspects of community learning development and the success of any initiative depends on effective collaboration and sharing of expertise and resources. It is beneficial to enable as wide a range of individuals and groups as possible to feed into and benefit from this skills development process.

\* Community Development Cymru. 2003



It is helpful to offer staff induction programmes that develop understanding of the values and principles underpinning a CUVP community learning approach. (See Appendix 1)

A continuing professional development programme that fosters a creative and dynamic community development approach will also be beneficial.

Staff Development Programmes could further include skills training in:

- ways of engaging with hard to reach groups
- organising informal community activities to facilitate participation in learning
- practical marketing and promotion techniques
- designing marketing strategies to target particular communities/groups
- valuing diversity and meeting learner needs, raising awareness of issues such as dyslexia, cultural differences and ensuring equality of access for learners with disabilities
- carrying out community learning surveys and mapping exercises
- consulting with learners and developing learner feedback processes
- developing networks and building partnerships



## Examples of Good Practice:

- 'Walking the Streets' - proactively working with community groups and individuals to raise awareness of learning opportunities, help identify and support learning aims
- Community Events - community learning can be a spin off from social or leisure events e.g. A Myths and Legends social evening held at the Dove Workshop highlighted local history in a fun way and resulted in a local history course being offered at the centre. A Health & Well Being Open Day at Glynneath Training Centre resulted in demands for new courses in horticulture and healthy eating
- Using the right language to market courses and adapting course content to make it relevant to community interests and needs - e.g. University of Glamorgan advertised a part-time maths course as '*Helping your child with maths homework*'
- Packaging course promotions to link to interests of target groups
- Tapping in to Networks - Links with community organisations and support services such as health visitors and Mothers and Toddlers groups can be useful ways of engaging with parents
- Events such as pub quizzes and music or dance sessions can be used to highlight the benefits and fun of community learning
- Marketing via partnership working and being mentioned in other people's prospectuses
- Taster courses, Bite-Size courses, giving people the chance to try out learning without long term commitments
- Carrying out surveys of tutors, learners, local business to find out what learning is of interest/needed
- Personal recommendations from learners  
(Nothing can beat word of mouth)





There is a range of resource materials and websites that can provide useful hints and examples of good practice -

- ♦ NIACE Dysgu Cymru's - Bang the Drum for Learning - a toolkit for promoting learning [http:// www.niacedc.org.uk](http://www.niacedc.org.uk)
- ♦ WCVA - Wales Council for Voluntary Action has a range of information sheets that provide useful advice on promotion and media communication [www.wcva.org.uk](http://www.wcva.org.uk)



## Appendix 1

### The Community University of the Valleys Partnership Values & Principles

The CUV Partnership is committed to generating a democratic and inclusive learning culture that is based upon

- co-operation
- mutual respect amongst learners and tutors
- tolerance and understanding of difference & cultural diversity
- the promotion of achievement
- values of equality and social justice

We recognise the importance of learning as a social and collective experience and thus share a commitment to promoting learning environments in which learners are encouraged to value and support one another. This support will encompass both 'academic' and emotional needs. It is especially important for tutors to recognise the skills and experience that adult learners bring to the learning environment and the need to 'start where the learners are'.

Quality learning centres will have structures to ensure that learners can participate in democratic decision making on matters such as timing, content, style of learning and 'extra curricular' activities. It will also be important to develop mechanisms that enable learners to hold learning providers accountable for the quality of the learning experience. Ownership of the learning process will be of great significance to those previously excluded from learning.

Extract from 'Aiming High - Good Practice in Community Learning'  
Available from <http://www.cuv.org.uk/gpguides.htm>



## Appendix 2

### Values and Principles Underpinning a Community Development Approach:

- A commitment to Community Development as a liberating process in its own right, providing personal and group development through learning, reflection, evaluation, and self-challenge
- The facilitation and support of people working collectively together to influence change and exert control over the environmental, economic, political and social issues that affect their lives
- The adoption of participative processes and structures, which include and empower excluded and marginalized groups within society
- The promotion of anti-oppressive, anti-sexist and anti-racist community development work with emphasis on the inclusion of marginalized groups
- The promotion of the self-development and self-determination of community groups
- The promotion of sustainable development based on the values and principles of community development
- The confronting of prejudice and discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, socio-economic status, age, disability, health status, culture, language or religion
- The challenging of inequitable power relationships within society and promotion of the redistribution of power, wealth and resources. The creation of a more just and equal society through the promotion of a policy agenda drawn from local action and experience



- Involvement in political processes to influence public, private and voluntary sector policy and practice relating to community development
- The fostering of a creative and dynamic approach to community development, open and supportive of innovation and co-operation between organisations, locally, nationally and internationally

Extract from the Community Development Cymru website  
<http://www.cdc.cymru.org> (in CDC Information/Principles & Values)



## 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