



Community University of the Valleys Partnership

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Quality in Community 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 lifelong 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.

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Strategic Partners

- Amman Valley Enterprise
- Blaenllechau Community Regeneration
- Bryncynon Community Revival Strategy
- Ebbw Fach Development Trust
- Glynneath Training Centre
- Telecentre & Business School Porth
- The Dove Centre, Banwen
- The Open University in Wales
- The Penderry Partnership Swansea
- Tredegar Development Trust
- University of Glamorgan
- University of Wales College Newport
- University of Wales Swansea
- Workers Educational Assoc. South Wales



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Message of Support from the CUV Partnerships's Policy 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. Peter Bush - Director, The Open University in Wales

Prof. James Lusty - Chief Executive, University of Wales College Newport

Mr Paul Nagle - Manager Telecentre Et Business School - on behalf of Community Partners

Sir Adrian Webb - Vice Chancellor, University of Glamorgan

Prof. Robin Williams - Vice Chancellor, University of Wales Swansea



Community University of the Valleys Partnership

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Quality in Community Learning - Guidance for Partners

The Community University of the Valleys Partnership supports the development of a Lifelong Learning culture and is committed to continually improving the quality of teaching and learning in order to widen participation. Its aim at all times is to raise the status, quality and resourcing of community based learning. The Partnership acknowledges the diversity of community learning provision and understands that not all partners will have the same level of resource. The partnership will work strategically to maximise resources for high quality community learning across the West Wales and Valleys area.

This Guidance has been developed through a collaborative process involving representatives of partner organisations. It is rooted in and seeks to elaborate upon the values and ethos set out in the Partnership's Mission Statement. It is hoped that this guidance will make a contribution to the process of improving quality. It is not an exhaustive statement and further examples of good practice for inclusion would be welcomed.

All CUV Partner organisations are expected to aim towards:

- ➔ Upholding a shared ethos
- ➔ Developing a common approach to the curriculum
- ➔ Ensuring a range of quality support for learners & tutors
- ➔ Providing well equipped and accessible learning centres



We believe that **Adults Learn Best When...**

- ➔ They are comfortable and in a friendly environment
- ➔ The setting is informal, non threatening and close to home (especially for initial contact)
- ➔ The environment and provision is appropriate for all genders and cultural backgrounds
- ➔ Their experience is valued
- ➔ They are self-motivated
- ➔ What they learn is useful to their lives
- ➔ Curriculum is negotiated and relevant to identified needs
- ➔ There is a two way process - negotiating learning, content as well as style
- ➔ There is respect between tutor/learner and vice versa
- ➔ There is good interaction between tutor and learners and participation is encouraged
- ➔ The tutor is inspiring
- ➔ The learning and assessment process is challenging and promotes confidence
- ➔ They are encouraged and supported to succeed and progress
- ➔ Their choices are supported by ongoing access to information and guidance





Ethos

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.

We want to create **high quality** learning environments that are

- ➔ Accessible
- ➔ Friendly
- ➔ Comfortable
- ➔ Stimulating

We expect venues for learning to be accessible to all and also wherever possible within the heart of communities and highly visible. They will also be accessible in the sense of being welcoming and



approachable. This will involve clear signage, welcoming reception arrangements and easily digested information about learning opportunities.

Crossing the threshold into an unfamiliar environment is a major step for anybody returning to learning. Partners will need procedures for making that step as simple as possible by providing appropriate support. This may include giving out the names of people to contact at the centre in publicity and undertaking outreach work amongst local groups.

Various factors will determine whether or not a new learner feels that a venue is comfortable. These include issues such as the quality of the physical surroundings including decoration, furniture and equipment. Pictures and posters, including sayings, can contribute to the quality of the environment. The atmosphere will be just as important. For many, informality will be vital. For others, recognition of their particular needs in terms of culture or gender will be essential. It is also desirable to provide a variety of spaces so that different needs can be accommodated. Privacy for guidance and certain women only provision will be essential. An area for socialising and making refreshments will help to create a more communal atmosphere.



We seek to offer a style of learning and assessment that is supportive and collaborative. It will be important to adopt learning and teaching methods that dispel previous negative learning perceptions. We want to recognise the diversity and richness of skills and experience that adults bring to the learning environment. All learners will be valued and encouraged to participate fully in the learning process. The practice of negotiating ground rules at the beginning of a session or course can help to ensure a co-operative atmosphere where all learners can have their voices heard.



Informal learning and non-accredited provision are ideal for building confidence and for skills development. The achievement of milestones set by or negotiated with the learners can also have a positive impact on morale. It is important that guidance is available to assist learners to make appropriate choices and that accreditation systems emphasise achievement rather than failure. Innovative ways of accrediting achievement include

- ➔ The use of group portfolios as evidence of learning
- ➔ Offering multi-level accreditation programmes with accreditation such as OCN underpinning HE learning achievement

Curriculum

The Community University of the Valleys Partnership is committed to providing innovative learning programmes and supportive guidance structures to target those currently excluded and to support the cultural, social and economic regeneration of the communities of West Wales and the Valleys. A Quality Curriculum reflects the values of the Partnership and fosters critical awareness and democratic citizenship. We expect a range of learning to be available in communities so that learners can progress from informal learning to degree level as appropriate to their needs.

The Partnership expects the curriculum to support both personal and community development, and to be **flexible and relevant to the needs of the learners**. Curriculum will also need to be appropriate for people of all ages and cultures. This will involve a process of negotiation between centres/providers and learners. This means 'starting where the learners are' and engaging with learners to identify their needs and expectations. This may be an unfamiliar experience for some adults returning to learn for the first time since school days. Some learners will have clear and specific learning goals; others will have more general aims, such as having time to themselves, away from caring responsibilities. Many will limit their



choices to what they imagine to be available, based on stereotypical views of adult education or on the experience of friends or relatives.

The process of **negotiating the curriculum** is not necessarily one of simply providing what is requested. It should be a process of exploration of possible options, of broadening choice and of linking learning to the issues facing the local community.

This process is clearly challenging for centres/providers and learners. Expectations will be raised and therefore there is a need for honesty and clarity about the constraints that may apply such as availability of tutors or funding, or the need for minimum numbers in a group. Learners may need to negotiate amongst themselves to ensure that sufficient numbers are available for a preferred topic. This will involve learners compromising with one another and trusting that they will get their first choice at a future occasion. The process of negotiation is a learning experience in itself and is a first step in learner democracy. Participants will practice and gain transferable skills. It will be important to develop **mechanisms to review the curriculum** and plan future provision, involving learners and providers.



It will be important for teaching styles, curriculum content and curriculum materials to reflect and **promote equality of opportunity and cultural diversity**. We expect curriculum to challenge stereotypes, present positive role models from different cultures and to celebrate cultural diversity. Systems need to be in place for tutors and managers to check materials for equal opportunities issues and to assess the appropriateness of strategies for teaching, learning and the curriculum.

We expect learners to be able to develop, with appropriate advice and guidance, from an open access style of learning through to HE level either within the community or on campus. Information needs to be provided on the widest range of options including work, voluntary work or community action.



A quality learning environment is one where

- ➔ The teaching and learning style is interactive and directed towards building learners' self-confidence.
- ➔ Assessment is used to build confidence through emphasising learners' achievements rather than shortcomings
- ➔ Provision is planned in the context of learner aims and progression routes – both vertical and horizontal.
- ➔ Learning promotes equality of opportunity and encourages good relations between people of different ages and racial groups
- ➔ Learner achievement is celebrated

The CUV Partnership will work to strategically to develop systems to support this work.

Support for Learners

The Community University of the Valleys Partnership will work strategically to assist the capacity of individual partners to provide a range of quality support services for learners at their centre. These will include:

A clear and comprehensive **Learner Handbook**.

Tutors recruited on the basis of their commitment to the values of community based learning and the ethos of the Partnership as well as their academic qualifications. They will be:

- ➔ aware of learners' lifestyles, constraints, family responsibilities and commitments
- ➔ comfortable with a learner-centred approach to teaching and learning
- ➔ able to balance the need to build learners' confidence while also challenging and extending them.

Advice and guidance on all aspects of education and progression that is impartial, community based and ongoing. It should be



available prior to course enrolment to carry out a learner needs analysis and at regular intervals to facilitate learner progression and development

Comprehensive information on learning opportunities and progression routes available in electronic or hard copy format.

Essential skills support provided in a flexible way.

Study skills support offered either as an integral part of courses or as stand alone provision, negotiated to meet the needs of each group.

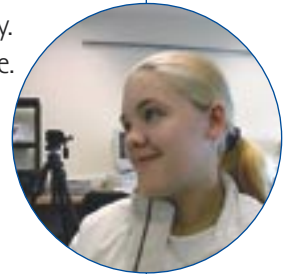
High quality, comprehensive **library resources** to support learning and where possible on-line links with University libraries. It is also important to make links with local libraries. Arrangements could be made to transport learners to their local University library. Learners should be made aware of all the resources available.

ICT resources and support on how to access the internet for learning and research, with **innovative learning materials** in place to back up provision. Communications links could be developed between all partners to develop a virtual learning environment with opportunities for group conferencing, chat rooms, etc.

Promotional activities that are friendly and informal, with supportive initiatives such as taster sessions. In addition, marketing and information materials that are sensitive to issues of diversity and present positive images of life and work in our multi-ethnic society

A **learners' network** with the aim of:

- encouraging learners to support one another
- developing mentoring structures
- developing systems for feedback
- reviewing the curriculum and planning future provision
- evaluating course content, presentation and styles of delivery
- organising social and cultural activities within and beyond the centre
- initiating community development





Provision of **childcare** alongside learning, arranged through partnership with a childcare provider or holistic, family learning approach including both crèche and after school provision.

Systems to ensure Learners are fully aware of **fee concessions** and other financial assistance

Well publicised options for **travel cost support** and community transport initiatives. Where partners are seeking external funding it is advisable to include a budget for the cost of transporting learners, especially those with mobility problems.

Services and resources to meet the varied **needs of people with disabilities**. This will involve ensuring physical access for wheelchair users together with suitably equipped toilets. It will be helpful to have links with specialist organisations such as RNIB, RNID and the SHAW Trust to obtain current information on services and facilities that are available. Full use should be made of support available from other organisations, such as funding from ELWa to help disabled learners access learning and work. Information on resources that may be obtained through Access or Hardship funds will be available from University Disability Officers. Ideally Partners will be able to offer special software for people with visual impairment and loops to assist those with hearing impairment. Once available these resources need to be publicised amongst disability groups and organisations. Arrangements should also be made with specialist organisations in order to provide counselling and related welfare support.

An informed approach to curriculum planning and learning delivery– it will be important to acknowledge that adult learning provision has been traditionally focused on a white/middle class culture and that we need to offer new learning opportunities that reflect the social, cultural, economic and domestic realities of people in our communities.

Simplified systems and processes to minimise barriers of bureaucratic procedures such as those for enrolment and assessment, with personalised advice and support.



Support for Tutors/Development Workers

The Community University of the Valleys Partnership recognises the importance and value of **skilled and committed tutors** to the process of learner support. The Partnership will seek funding to develop a Continuing Professional Development Programme for Community Tutors that will help partners to provide:

- ➔ Induction training, mentoring and personal development support
- ➔ Skills training in the use of IT and the internet in teaching and learning
- ➔ Skills training in special needs support areas and in identifying and addressing essential and study skills needs
- ➔ Training in equal opportunities issues and cultural, racial and disability awareness
- ➔ Training in learner led approaches to learning and curriculum development

This programme will also enable the Partnership to set up a **Community Tutor Network** to

- ➔ Encourage the exchange of information and good practice
- ➔ Enable tutors to identify development and capacity needs
- ➔ Support the development of a community tutor resource website





Physical Resources

The Community University of the Valleys Partnership expects partners to provide high quality resources for community learning including:

learning centres sited in the heart of the community which are

- ➔ highly visible
- ➔ familiar to potential learners
- ➔ easily accessible
- ➔ visually attractive
- ➔ welcoming in appearance

signage that is clear and obvious both outside and within the building. External signage both on the buildings and in the surrounding area will improve identification and therefore access for learners. Clear internal signage will explain the learning opportunities and resources available.

a warm and informal welcome. It is important that first time callers to a centre are met by a friendly face as soon as they enter the premises – the personal touch is invaluable. Plants, posters and pictures all contribute to a welcoming atmosphere.

adequate space and facilities to meet the diverse needs of learners and staff. In addition to teaching and office space quality provision will include:

- ➔ ramps, handrails or a stairlift
- ➔ toilets equipped for people with disabilities sited as near as possible to teaching areas
- ➔ crèche
- ➔ community information/library area with internet access
- ➔ ICT suite
- ➔ private space for guidance interviews
- ➔ storage area



- ➔ photocopier for use by learners and staff
- ➔ kitchen/refreshment area with room for socialising

quality equipment for teaching and learning to maximise learning potential including:

- ➔ an ICT suite with networked PCs, internet access and up to date software.
- ➔ overhead projector
- ➔ data projector
- ➔ TV/video player
- ➔ Audio cassette player
- ➔ Flip charts/white board
- ➔ basic inexpensive special needs items such as 'triangular grip' pens for people with arthritis

adequate car parking for learners and staff.

high standards of Health and Safety and compliance with all relevant regulations. Quality centres will be well ventilated and have good lighting. Tutors and learners will be made aware of health and safety procedures including evacuation procedures in case of fire.





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 to target those currently excluded and to 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 models of good practice that emphasise community based, collaborative and student-centred learning and disseminating our experiences of partnership in community based learning
- vi developing structures that will give learners and communities opportunities to participate as equal partners, to negotiate a curriculum suited to their needs and to influence the development of appropriate learning programmes and support services
- vii affording equal status and mutual respect to all representatives within the partnership and recognising the importance of community groups not directly represented
- viii supporting excellence in research on learning and communities, in order to inform partnership 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