

Family Learning Framework



The Family Learning Framework is a flexible model designed to help adult education providers and schools incorporate family learning into their programmes. It aims to boost family learning as a pathway to lifelong learning, skills development, employability, and job opportunities for both adults and children.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

D&G SEFYDLIAD DYSGU A GWAITH **L&W**
LEARNING AND WORK INSTITUTE

[This document is available in Welsh](#)

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Family Learning practice is rooted in the traditions of adult community education and community development.



Introduction



Why is family learning important?



Family learning changes lives. Evidence shows that when learning opportunities for adults are linked to the education of children in the family, it builds motivation, confidence and a commitment to learning. It is particularly effective as an approach to reaching and engaging adults who have benefited least from their initial education, have fewer qualifications and little experience of paid work. As an engagement tool family learning develops skills and pathways to further learning and employment.

There's a growing recognition that family learning has an important role to play in achieving a wide range of positive outcomes, from educational improvements and better health outcomes and wellbeing, to supporting skills development and people back into work.

Family learning provides a stepping-stone back into formal learning and training, employability and employment progression. In turn, this improves educational, social and economic outcomes for families as a whole.

Family learning has a rich tradition in Wales. There is renewed interest among policymakers, schools and the adult education sector in developing and extending provision in response to the opportunities and challenges we face today.





“Families are the bedrock of our society. The family provides both a safety net and a springboard from which to make a place in the world. Parents are the primary teacher, mentors and guides for children and young people. Research shows that children stand a much better chance of succeeding in life if their parents are engaged in learning. Family learning provides a low-pressure safe and enjoyable step back into formal adult learning – one that appeals to parents’ strong desire to support their children. It strengthens communication and maths skills, develops confidence to learn and can be a stepping stone to further education and training.”

Family Learning Works: Inquiry into Family Learning

Challenges

- **Economic inactivity rates** in Wales are high, at 20.3% (excluding students) for the year ending March 2024.
- **The proportion of working age adults in Wales without any qualifications** is estimated at 7.9% in 2023 against a Welsh Government target of 5% or below in every local authority by 2050.
- **The proportion of working age adults qualified to level 3 or higher** is low, estimated at 67.4% in 2023 against a Welsh Government target of 75% by 2050.
- **The proportion of working age adults with qualifications at level 4 and above** is lower in Wales than the UK as a whole.
- **The proportion of young people who are not in employment, education and training** remains high at 14.2% and above the target of 10% set by Welsh Government for 2050.
- **Participation rates in adult education** (measured by those who have engaged in learning over the last three years) in Wales are the lowest of all UK nations and similarly we have the lowest participation in higher education of all UK nations.
- **Around 12% of working-age adults in Wales** have low literacy skills, and about 50% have low numeracy skills.
- **With the increasing importance of technology in everyday life and work**, digital skills are essential. However, many adults struggle with these skills, and about 10% of adults in Wales are not online.
- **Where parents have low levels of basic skills**, their children may also struggle; where parents are living in poverty, with poor health, in poor housing, it is also clear that they may struggle to support their children's education.



“I feel proud of what I’ve achieved. It’s boosted my self-esteem and focus – and most importantly has given me new friends. For the first time in years, I’m socialising and enjoying my life. I’ve got a passport; I’m helping to run a book club and I’m part of the new school Parent Teacher Association. It feels like my life has started.”

Lucy Willis



What is family learning?



Family learning has traditionally been an educational approach where adults and children learn together. It happens in diverse settings including community venues, schools and the home.

It can be defined as:

‘Any learning activity that impacts on both children and adult family members, where learning outcomes are intended for both, and that contributes to a culture of learning in the family.’

Why has this Framework been developed?

Welsh Government recognises the potential of family learning to help tackle educational disadvantage and persistent inequalities in employment and wider life experiences and outcomes. It is committed to supporting the more widespread adoption of this distinctive and transformational educational approach.

The framework provides a flexible model for adult education providers and schools which are not currently involved in the delivery of family learning and would like to embed it into their practice. It aims to strengthen the role of family learning as a route into lifelong learning, skills development, employability, and employment opportunities for adults and children.

Explicitly, the framework’s purpose is to help harness the power of family learning to challenge social and economic inequalities by engaging and supporting adults who – due to race, social class, gender or other factors – have been disadvantaged in their experiences of education and employment.



Links and resources:

[Fit for purpose: the wider outcomes of family learning](#)

[Family Learning Works The Inquiry into Family Learning in England and Wales](#)

Family learning programmes typically include:

- A focus on learning that will help adult family members to develop the skills and knowledge to support children's learning and development more effectively, such as communication, literacy, numeracy, confidence building and healthy eating.
- Embedded entry pathways for a range of adult skills including ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), Welsh, English, maths, digital and employability skills, and progression routes to formal adult qualifications, GCSEs and pathways to further and higher education, including access courses, foundation and degree programmes.

Family learning is constantly evolving in response to the changing needs of learners and the contexts in which it is being delivered. Currently, family learning that happens in school settings in Wales broadly takes three distinct forms which reflect the needs of adults and children in different types of schools.

Primary schools

- Both adult-only and mixed adult and children learning activities take place.
- Typically structured so that adult only sessions focus on learning skills which are then applied to support children's learning in mixed sessions.
- Adults' personal learning needs are also identified and they are supported with appropriate opportunities for learning and progression.

Special schools

- Sessions are typically for adults only.
- Focus is on understanding, and developing skills and strategies for managing child's condition.
- Adults' personal learning needs are also identified and they are supported with appropriate opportunities for learning and progression.

Secondary schools

- Sessions are typically for adults only.
- Focus is on understanding what and how children are learning so that adults can support with homework and progression.
- Adults' personal learning needs are also identified and they are supported with appropriate opportunities for learning and progression.

Adults are generally motivated to join a family learning course by a desire to support their children's learning. Often, this motivation is greatest at points of transition, such as when a child starts school, moves from primary to secondary school, or receives a diagnosis of special educational needs. Once adults are engaged, they are encouraged and supported to address their own learning needs and interests too, although this intention may not be explicitly stated at the outset.

While family learning has historically tended to assume that adult learners are parents, current practice in Wales stresses a broader and more inclusive approach which reflects the diversity of family forms and family dynamics. Provision is often targeted at "the adults around the child", which can include any family member, grandparents, foster parents or any person in a key caring role.

Family learning practice is rooted in the traditions of adult community education and community development. As such, it is inherently orientated towards challenging the structural factors that perpetuate inequality and unfairness in society and helping to break cycles of disadvantage. It values the different strengths and skills that learners with diverse backgrounds and experiences bring to their learning and starts with their needs and interests.

And of course, family learning is fun!



Links and resources:

[Family Learning Framework Advice for Practitioners](#)

[Family Learning Works The Inquiry into Family Learning in England and Wales: Summary](#)

How to use the framework:



The Framework is not a prescriptive "how to" guide. Rather, it offers a broad outline of the key elements of a successful family learning programme which can be interpreted and applied to suit specific learner needs and help you to develop practice that suit your own delivery context.

It is based on insights from current practice, with a series of case studies showing how family learning is currently delivered through a range of approaches and in different types of school settings.

A partnership approach across schools, adult community learning partnerships and wider partners.

Elements of the planning and delivery process include:



For each of these elements, the framework includes:

- A summary of why it's important.
- Key points summarising what the case studies tell us about "what works."
- Links to further information and resources.

The framework also includes two appendices: the first summarises recent evidence on the impact of family learning and the second highlights key policy areas with which family learning overlaps and to which it contributes.

This Framework has been co-created by Learning and Work Institute on behalf of Welsh Government with the family learning sector in Wales.

What makes a successful partnership?

Why is this important?

Partnership working underpins the delivery of successful family learning, core partners are, as a minimum, a school and a local family learning provider.

This brings together the professional skills, knowledge and experience of school leaders, teachers and engagement officers alongside adult learning practitioners. This provides the dual focus on the learning needs of children and adults that is the distinctive feature of family learning.

The involvement of a family learning provider gives family learning programmes a link into local Adult Community Learning Partnerships which provide a gateway to a wider range of provision, progression, services and support. Partners in the third sector and local public services can play an important role in widening the scope of local programmes and supporting the development of targeted and tailored provision.

Across all the elements of the planning and delivery process covered in this Framework, partnership working enables family learning programmes to access expertise, funding and resources, learning opportunities and learners.

What works?

- Core partners have dedicated staffing in place with responsibility for developing and promoting family learning, such as Family Engagement Officers in schools, Community Focused Schools Managers and Family Learning Coordinators in community learning providers.
- Family learning is written into a school's School Improvement Plan / School Development Plan, signalling its strategic commitment to supporting and developing the approach.
- Partners work together to identify and access sustainable sources of funding and other resources to support the ongoing development and delivery of family learning.

Links and resources:

Adult Learning in the Community Partnerships: Estyn sector report 2021-2

Overview of the work of the 13 Adult Learning in the Community Partnerships that operate across Wales to plan and coordinate the delivery of adult community learning.

Community Focused Schools

A Community Focused Schools approach values and promotes community learning, in which family learning is an important element. A suite of guidance is being developed to support Community Focused Schools and includes information on family and community learning. [Annex 4: Developing Community Engagement in Community Focused Schools](#).

Family and Community Engagement

A suite of guidance materials and other resources designed to provide practical support for schools in Wales to help them develop and strengthen their approach to family and community engagement (FaCE). The emphasis is on engagement that helps families to actively support their child's learning.

Identifying need

Why is this important?

To make the best use of limited resources, at least some degree of targeting of family learning programmes towards families in greatest need is likely to be required. At the same time, it is usual for targeting to take place within a wider universal approach, to avoid stigmatising certain families and communities and extend the opportunity to participate to all who could benefit.

For family learning providers, the key consideration will be identifying which schools to prioritise for engagement and a collaborative approach with school leaders to plan approaches to reach families. Targeting may be based on year groups, classes or individual families with particular vulnerabilities. Successful family learning provision has reached a wide range of cohorts with a focus on building their skills.

What works?

- Planning, partnerships and co-production to make use of data and local intelligence to deliver programmes that reach out to those families who may be in most need of support.
- Family learning providers make use of data from official sources to identify relative levels of need in local areas and pinpoint schools and communities to prioritise for engagement. This includes national datasets such as the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation and data held by local authorities on indicators such as entitlement to free school meals, vulnerable families, essential skills and English language needs for minority ethnic communities.
- Local intelligence gleaned from partners working "on the ground" enables family learning providers to keep up to date with changes in the local community that may inform their development work. They may be alerted to the needs of young carers, looked after children and new arrivals from a particular refugee or migrant community, and may have a range of support needs which family learning can help to address, but do not immediately show up in official data.

Links and resources:

Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation

The Welsh Government's official measure of relative deprivation for small areas across Wales. It identifies areas with the highest concentrations of several different types of deprivation.



“The families at the school are from a variety of different cultural backgrounds and the courses have helped parents develop a better understanding and awareness of different cultures and this has led to better community cohesion both in and out of school.”

Cardiff and Vale College, Impact of Family Learning and the Citizen’s Curriculum



Developing the curriculum



Why is this important?

Family learning programmes simultaneously seek to support learning for children and adults.

The types of activities that fall within family learning programmes is hugely diverse and include:

- One-off creative workshops where adults and children learn and practice new skills together.
- Accredited courses lasting a whole term or more which develop adults' understanding of their child's learning needs and build their skills to support their child's development.
- Learning activities which provide opportunities for adults to work on their own essential skills and employability skills.
- Language learning that may focus on ESOL or Welsh for families.

Determining what is to be delivered, when, where and how is an iterative process carried out through partnership and dialogue between schools, family learning providers and learners themselves. Schools generally have a broad idea of what they want the focus of a programme to be, then family learning practitioners work with families to explore their interests, needs and existing skills and develop course content to reflect these.

Cardiff and Vale College (CAVC) piloted a [Citizens Curriculum approach to family learning in 2024](#). Their "Families Learning Together" initiative focuses on co-production between CAVC and learners to understand their interests and challenges and designing a programme of learning to address their needs.

What works?

- Family learning courses are mapped to the Curriculum for Wales.
- Schools use intelligence from a range of sources including school data and informal interactions with children, parents and carers to understand their families' learning needs.
- Schools and adult learning practitioners work together to set the broad parameters for a family learning programme and identify key themes or topics on which they would like it to focus.
- Specific learning activities are co-produced with learners. Practitioners support participating families to identify their interests and existing skills and strengths and build on these to develop a responsive programme of learning activities that are engaging, relevant and motivating.
- There is a holistic perspective to family learning programmes, so that learning activities promote the development of knowledge and skills around themes such as healthy eating, fitness, mental health and household budgeting, to contribute to wider family wellbeing.

- Attention is paid to how the type and focus of learning activities can build motivation and help to overcome barriers to participation. For example, learning based around practical and manual skills can help to engage men.
- Essential skills and employability skills such as CV building are embedded into family learning programmes.
- Adults receive support and advice to progress to accredited courses and employability skills programmes where appropriate and are linked into support available through Working Wales.
- Adult Community Learning Partnerships provide family learning programmes with access to tutors in a wide range of creative and practical subject areas who can support delivery. Tapping into this expertise allows a diverse range of fun and engaging activities to be offered.
- Family learning providers pro-actively seek project funding and funding from other sources such as Lottery or local authority grants, to enable bespoke learning opportunities to be developed which address specific learning needs of the families with whom they work.
- In developing learning activities, providers are mindful that some families may have limited access to digital technology and design provision and support to ensure that this does not present a barrier to full participation.



Links and resources:

Curriculum for Wales

Guidance and support for practitioners on working with the Curriculum for Wales.

Campaign for Learning: National Centre for Family Learning.

The National Centre for Family Learning is based in England and developed by the Campaign for Learning. It provides resources and support for family learning.

Cardiff and Vale College - Impact of Family Learning and the Citizen's Curriculum - September 2024.

Cwmpas were commissioned by Cardiff and Vale College (CAVC) to undertake an evaluation of the 'Families Learning Together' programme and the schools in East Cardiff were involved in the Citizen's Curriculum Programme.

Engaging families



Why is this important?

Family learning harnesses the inherent wish of parents and carers to help and support their children as the 'hook' to engage them. For schools, the value of family learning rests chiefly on its potential as a model for parental engagement.

Inevitably, children who are experiencing challenges that negatively impact their learning and attainment are also often those whose parents and carers had a difficult relationship with their school and faced barriers to learning themselves.

Family learning offers the possibility for positive interactions and the development of a more productive and mutually supportive relationship. In the wake of the covid pandemic, when evidence increasingly suggests that a large number of pupils and families have become estranged from school to a greater or lesser degree, schools are seeking to reconnect with renewed urgency.

What works?

- Engaging families is done most effectively when a Family Engagement Officer is in post in the school. They have generally already built a relationship with families and can promote family learning from a position of trust.
- Family learning is championed by the senior leadership team within the school and seen as an integral part of a community focused programme, with the support of the board of Governors.
- Informal peer-to-peer word of mouth is a powerful way of building interest and motivation among parents and carers. Schools can look at developing a network of parent/carer advocates or champions who can help spread the word about the benefits of family learning and encourage others to take part.
- Schools take the opportunity to embed information about family learning across all suitable school activities and communications, such as parents evenings, newsletters, and welcome or transition activities for new pupils.
- Learner engagement in schools uses a mix of universal and targeted approaches. Circulating information about family learning opportunities and the invitation to participate to all families within a defined cohort means that participation does not carry a stigma, which could serve to discourage engagement. Schools follow this up with "soft" targeting of families they wish to prioritise for participation.
- Practical steps are taken to address barriers to participation, such as providing a crèche for families who also have pre-school children.

- Providing a dedicated space for family learning – a family room which parents can use for informal catch ups, providing a safe space to build relationships and access resources.
- Community outreach by the Family Engagement Officer and Community Focused Schools Manager and the building of links with third sector organisations and local public services helps both to engage and target families and extend family learning opportunities to families in the wider community.



“We spend time engaging the most vulnerable families to enable them to re-engage with education and learning and then support them to move on to adult learning classes or employment support programmes. The target is to support their child’s learning in school, but this enables the conversation to develop their own skills and begin their journey.”

Kellie Bellmaine, Launch Adult Learning Coordinator, Monkton Priory Community Primary School



Links and resources:

Family and Community Engagement

A suite of guidance materials and other resources designed to provide practical support for schools in Wales to help them develop and strengthen their approach to family and community engagement (FaCE). The emphasis is on engagement that helps families to actively support their child's learning.

Family Engagement

Family Engagement is a key element of a Community Focused Schools approach. A suite of guidance is being developed to support Community Focused Schools and includes information on family engagement within [Annex 3: Developing Family Engagement in Community Focused Schools](#).

Supporting progression



Why is this important?

Family learning is commonly promoted to parents, carers and schools as way of engaging adults to support their child's learning. However, a key purpose of family learning is to simultaneously support learning and skills development for adults, and for adult learning providers involved in the delivery of family learning, this is a primary objective.

Many adults who engage with family learning may not have benefited from their initial education. Many have low confidence in their educational abilities and may believe that they have few valuable skills to access good employment and that learning is not for them.

Others may have language (ESOL) needs, which compound their educational disadvantage. For some adults, school is a period of transition for them when they may be thinking of getting back into work or want to pick up and progress in learning that may have been halted because of a focus on childcare.

Family learning offers a safe, supported gateway into education and training. It provides an opportunity to get advice and guidance about opportunities that are available and a chance to review and recognise the many skills that participants will already have. These interactions provide a way to build networks of peers and professionals that can provide support and confidence to progress.

Through the involvement of adult learning providers, a structured route back to formal education and training can be planned with access to qualifications and employability support.

What works?

- Support for adult learners' progression is integral to family learning programmes. Progression pathways are mapped from family learning at the planning stage and connect learners to the full range of opportunities offered by partners in the Adult Community Learning Partnership and beyond.
- The local Adult Community Learning Partnership plays a key role in mapping progression routes to identify gaps and develop new provision to address these.
- A strengths-based approach is used to support learners to identify and recognise their existing skills, which helps to build confidence and motivation to explore opportunities for further skills development and employment.
- Learners with essential skills and ESOL needs are supported to access appropriate provision.

- Family learning tutors have up-to-date skills and knowledge to deliver embedded information, advice and guidance to learners while they are on a programme, and to support them to identify and access appropriate progression routes towards the end of a course.
- Family learning providers pro-actively create opportunities for partners who provide progression pathways such as employability skills support, access to further and higher education advice to engage with learners towards the end of a course. This is done through methods such as class visits, taster sessions, workshops and open days.
- Practical support is put in place to help learners take the step from school and community-based provision to further learning in college or in other settings.

Links and resources:

Working Wales

A portal providing information and access to the range of employability support programmes and other learning and career support opportunities funded through Welsh Government. Advisors can provide in-person or online support, advice and guidance.

Careers Wales

All-age careers information, advice and guidance service.

Reaching Wider

Initiative providing support for young people and adults living in the bottom two quintiles of [Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation \(WIMD\)](#) to access post 16 education. Support is delivered through regional partnerships and each partnership or partner university provides details on its website.

The Open University in Wales - OpenLearn Wales

A collection of free online educational resources developed and curated by The Open University in Wales. OpenLearn Wales platform does not require you to become an Open University student, it is free, accessible, and gives people a wealth of educational resources to learn at your own pace.

Adult Learning Partnerships in Wales

There are Community Adult Learning Partnerships across Wales, involving local authority and further education community adult learning providers and a wider network of stakeholders to support engagement and progression.

Adult Learners' Week - Learning and Work Institute

Find free learning opportunities, inspiring stories, and helpful resources for adult education on Learning and Work Institute's campaign website, covering courses, events, qualifications, skills, and links to expert advice on qualifications, funding, skills, and employment.

Community Courses - Adult Learning Wales

Adult Learning Wales offer a range of community based and online provision designed to provide pathways into learning and progression onto further learning.



“My classes play a big part in helping to break down barriers and support pathways. For me it’s immensely rewarding helping learners progress in their English language and seeing them interact more effectively with their children and having fun together. It is a privilege to play a part in their journey.”

Clare Jones, Tutor, Adult Learning Wales

Evaluating impact

Why is this important?

It is important to understand how family learning is making a difference for participating families. Identifying both what outcomes have been achieved and the activities that have been most effective in delivering them (and those that haven't) is a critical step in the process of reflection, review and quality improvement.

Stakeholders are likely to have different priorities in terms of the outcomes they value most and want to see from family learning. For schools, parental engagement and children's attainment will be at the forefront, while for adult learning providers, the focus is more likely to be on adult participation, achievement and progression. Learners themselves will have their own personal motivations for taking part, and their own views about the outcomes that they hope to achieve.

Defining and agreeing these intended outcomes at the start of a programme means not only that appropriate activities can be planned, but also that consideration can be given to the methods that will be used to evaluate them – in other words, to find out how successful the programme has been at delivering them. There should also be scope to capture any unexpected outcomes that might be realised.

What works?

- The intended outcomes of family learning are identified at the outset so that evaluation can be planned into the programme's development and delivery.
- Data on indicators such as children's attendance and attainment and family engagement is reviewed and analysed to identify links to the participation of a family in Family Learning.
- End of course learner evaluations are used to capture data on learners' intentions and self-reported outcomes.
- Questionnaires used at the beginning and end of a course capture data on "distance travelled" in relation to key learning outcomes. Measuring the wider benefits and social value impact can provide powerful impact evidence.
- Case studies provide evidence of impact at the level of the individual learner, family or cohort, and show the means by which this was achieved.

Links and resources:

National TOMs Framework 2019

TOMs provides a framework and guidance for measuring social value.



“The schools reflected that children would be proud and excited to see their parent at school, and this made them more focused and engaged in class. All the adult learners that we spoke with reflected that their child was more willing to go to school on the days when the courses were taking place.”

Cardiff and Vale College, Impact of Family Learning and the Citizen’s Curriculum



Case studies



Monkton Priory Primary School
Launch Programme



Learning Pembrokeshire
Springboard Project



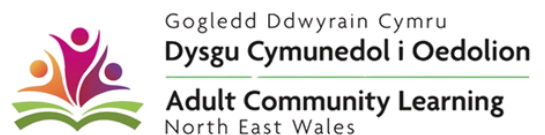
Cardiff and Vale College
Families Learning Together



Swansea Adult Community Learning Partnership




Cathays High School, Cardiff
Parent Learning Group



Wrexham and Flintshire Adult Community Learning Partnership

Monkton Priory Primary School: Launch Programme

Find out more about
the programme: 



A long-established engagement and adult learning programme called Launch has been developed by the Senior Leadership Team at Monkton Priory Primary School. Offering a range of provision to develop the skills of parents and the wider community, the programme responds to local needs and delivers opportunities for informal learning with progression onto higher education.

Monkton Priory Community Primary School Launch

Highlights:

- Hundreds of people in the community have gained a site safety passport and a recent review showed that 90% of participants went on to secure employment.
- The initiative has developed an accredited Domestic Abuse Awareness course.
- A partnership with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David delivers outreach Foundation and Degrees in Social Inclusion.
- Family learning and essential skills, an introduction to crèche work course and an introduction to mental health are all continually delivered.
- Additional support includes signposting to agencies for housing, domestic abuse, Citizens Advice and help with completing forms.



“Launch adult learning project based at Monkton Priory CP School is about empowering parents and the community to enhance their education, develop skills for employment, and foster a culture of lifelong learning that inspires future generations.”

Kellie Bellmaine, Launch Adult Learning Coordinator, Monkton Priory Community Primary School

Cardiff and Vale College: Families Learning Together



Find out more about
the programme:



Highlights:

- Reaches, engages and supports a high number of families through well-established partnerships between the college and local schools.
- Data-driven approach to identifying local areas of greatest need.
- Course content is co-designed with learners.
- Uses a strengths-based approach to support learners to recognise and value their existing skills. This helps to build motivation, self-esteem and promote progression to further learning, skills development and work.
- The college offers practical support to help learners progress from community-based learning to further provision. It has developed new bespoke transition courses for family learning learners who need to take smaller steps.
- Wider impacts include supporting parents to support children, building positive relations between school and parents, parent and child, developing positive community relationships and community cohesion, creating a sense of belonging, improving confidence and the health and wellbeing of participants.

Overview of the provision:

Families Learning Together is delivered in schools by a team of ten family learning tutors with qualified teacher status from Cardiff and Vale College. It is based around the principle of supporting parents and carers to support their children's learning. Courses are centred around the school terms and are typically ten weeks in duration. The provision is targeted at families with children from nursery to Key Stage 3. In a single term, the programme supports over 400 families and around 900 individual participants, running more than 50 courses and engaging with over 50 schools (through the medium of both Welsh and English) across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. During the pandemic bespoke provision was delivered online. The programme is funded through the college's part time FE funding and is Agored Cymru accredited.

Identifying need:

The college uses data from the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) to identify schools in the areas of greatest disadvantage across Cardiff and the Vale. While Families Learning Together is offered to all schools, the aim is to work in those areas with the highest WIMD score, other factors such as having a high proportion of ESOL learners are also taken into consideration. Positive relationships and trust with schools has been fostered and this leads to a collaborative approach to meeting learning outcomes for children and families, whilst meeting the ambitions of developing community focused schools.

Developing the curriculum:

Specialist tutors who focus on ESOL, Welsh and STEM deliver alongside the core areas of literacy, numeracy and digital skills development. The provision is delivered holistically and ESOL learners are also signposted to additional support provided through the college and community partners, which promotes equality, diversity and inclusion.

Digital exclusion (access to technology and skills) is a significant barrier for some parents and provision is designed to limit the impact on learning but also develop digital literacy skills with adult learners. The development of digital skills is embedded into all the classes and learners get free access to Office 365. Many are signposted to specific digital skills courses within the community and college.

The course design is co-created with learners through a baseline assessment of need, skills and aspirations. This approach has demonstrated high levels of retention and successful completion. This enables the provision to have a direct impact for learners and they value this opportunity as it reflects their aspirations. Examples of this includes an employability focus in various sectors, saving money online, staying safe online and family budgeting.

Engaging families:

Learner engagement is undertaken collaboratively between the college and participating schools, through outreach with Family Engagement Officers, posters and parent mail. Information about the courses is circulated to all families to ensure inclusivity. In addition, schools do some focused interventions by directly contacting families and calling parents and carers to encourage them to participate.

Schools play a pivotal role in pro-actively promoting family learning and support and endorsement throughout the school (from school leaders and staff at the gate) is critical to engaging families. This gives parents and carers confidence that the provision is supportive and relevant and that it will support the child's development.



“We ask that member of staff come into the playground with us to engage and promote the programmes. It is more impactful if the head teacher comes out with us because it gives it importance, but also, they can direct us to engage with the parents that would benefit most from the programme.”

The role of the Family Engagement Officer (FEO) in a school is often key to successfully reaching and engaging parents. The FEO has already started to build the relationship with parents and carers and can help to introduce family learning and act as a trusted intermediary between families and the college staff.

Where an FEO role is well-established, this generally indicates that the school already has a positive relationship with its families, conversely, challenges around engagement with family learning programmes tend to be rooted in issues in the wider state of relationships between school and parents:



“Where parents are already engaged in schools through coffee mornings and wider community programmes it is often easier to engage parents onto the programme.

“The programme provides an opportunity to progress the Community Focused Schools policy which promotes the need for schools to work closely with families to give children and young people the best home learning environment possible and ensuring families have the skills, confidence and resources to actively support their child’s learning at home.”

Supporting progression:

Supporting adults to engage, learn and progress are key aims of family learning programmes. This is not made explicit at the outset, as it is recognised that parents and carers are initially motivated to participate due to the benefits that will bring for their child's development. As the course progresses, parents and carers begin to focus on developing their own skills and aspirations and develop their own learner journey.



“It’s amazing how parents and carers enjoy supporting their children in learning and reflect on how they could have a ‘second chance’ on their own learner journey as they progress through the course.”

Each learner completes an initial baseline assessment and final assessment to measure their progress. This information feeds into the creation of an Individual Learning Plan (ILP), which helps participants set their own targets, and identifies and values the skills they already have. Recognising the skills they have gained through bringing up a family and running a home is often a surprise and this self-reflection ignites their own aspirations.

This strengths-based approach is vital, because many of the adults who join the programme had poor experiences of initial education, have few or no qualifications, and do not initially recognise that they have any valuable skills.

Where learners require support with essential skills or ESOL, they are supported to progress straight from family learning on to suitable courses within the college or in the community. Practical support is provided to facilitate progression from school-based to college-based provision, as it is recognised that this is a huge step for many learners. In the penultimate week of a course, all learners join the family learning team on a progression visit to the college which includes a tour of the facilities, opportunities to talk face to face with tutors, gain advice from the careers guidance team and wider adult learning providers; activities such as CV writing, as well as help with filling out enrolment forms for next step courses.

Recognising that not all learners are ready to progress from community to college-based provision, the college has introduced new progression routes within the family learning provision. Learners have the option to take a further family learning courses at a higher level, focusing on their community and developing skills through research and storytelling. Key areas focus on Personal and Social Education, Work Related Education; and providing information, advice and guidance (IGE) which is embedded in the course.

Evaluating impact:

Measuring impact is crucial in terms of tracking the learner journey both quantitatively and qualitatively. Progression is tracked if participants engage with further college courses and through the Cardiff and Vale Community Learning Partnership, if their next steps are to provision delivered through this network of providers. The quantitative data focuses on enrolment, retention and completion of learners (including qualification outcomes, alongside progression intentions).

What schools and where they are located are important in terms of reach and impact on areas of deprivation. Qualitative information is gathered from initial baseline information on learner starting points, distanced travelled, through progress against Individual Learning Plans and end-of-course evaluation where information is gathered from the child, parent/carer and school perspectives. This triangulation provides rich information on the success of each course and areas for further programme development.

Lessons Learnt:

Challenges

- Securing sustainable funding to deliver emerging needs.
- CPD for staff to co-create new curriculum based on need (non-prescriptive).
- Integrating curriculum into existing delivery models.
- Difficult to determine course outcomes if co-created leading to inconsistencies.
- Making the curriculum engaging and relevant to students' lives can be difficult but is central to its success.
- Collaborating with other providers to deliver learner aspirations is fundamental.
- Peer learning amongst tutors on co-creation and learner led curriculum design.

Benefits

- Inclusivity: Learners feel empowered and develop the gaps in their skills and knowledge.
- Active participation: Encourages healthy debate about issues within their own community.
- Social cohesion: Promotes mutual respect and understanding and fosters community cohesion.
- Resolve conflict: Equips learners with skills to resolve conflicts peacefully and engage in constructive dialogue.
- Personal development: Students develop self-confidence which can help them navigate life changes and challenges.
- Enhancing critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- Staff are learning from learners on what matters to them.
- Curriculum design: Project-Based Learning (PBL) engages learners in projects that address real-world issues in their communities. This method helps learners apply what they learn in practical, meaningful ways.
- Current events: Incorporate discussions on current and controversial events to help learners understand different perspectives and develop critical thinking skills.
- Organise debates on various topics to encourage learners to research, articulate their views, and respect differing opinions.
- Collaborative Learning: Use group projects to foster collaboration and teamwork. This helps learners learn to work with others towards common goals.
- Guest speakers: Invite community leaders, experts, and public officials to speak to learners about their roles and experiences in civic life.

Cathays High School, Cardiff: Parent Learning Group



Find out more about
the programme:



Highlights:

- The school funds a dedicated in-house Family Learning Coordinator and family learning is integral to its approach to family engagement.
- The school partners with adult learning providers, third sector organisations and local public services to offer a wide-ranging programme of courses, workshops and awareness raising sessions to meet the specific needs of its families and the wider community.
- The programme uses a personalised, strengths-based approach to support progression, which builds on learners' existing skills and knowledge, enabling progression to volunteering, further learning and employment opportunities.
- A termly family learning Careers Meet and other tailored and targeted activities connect learners to local FE and HE providers, employability support and employers.
- A quarterly evaluation and review captures evidence of impact and informs the on-going development and improvement of the programme.

Overview of the provision:

Cathays High School is an 11-19 mixed English-medium secondary school located in central Cardiff. It has over 1,269 pupils on the roll, of whom 40.7 per cent are eligible for free school meals and 28 per cent have English as an additional language. The report of its last inspection (2022) describes the school as, "a highly inclusive and aspirational learning community where pupils and staff thrive."

Family learning is delivered through the school's Parent Learning Group and coordinated by a dedicated staff member employed by the school. The Parent Learning group was set up to provide a structured way for the school to engage and support parents and carers to support their children's learning. It aims to put family learning at the heart of a holistic approach which supports families to address the range of challenges that prevent a child from flourishing.

Learning activities are tailored to the needs of families in the school and in the wider community and for reasons of space are delivered mainly in community settings.



Through partnerships with Adult Learning Cardiff, Adult Learning Wales, Cardiff Metropolitan University, widening access, third sector organisations and local public service providers, the coordinator has developed a wide-ranging programme of accredited and non-accredited adult community learning courses, workshops and awareness raising sessions. There is a strong focus on progression to employment and further learning.

Identifying need:

The family learning programme is designed around the very specific needs of families in the school. The coordinator carries out a needs analysis to create a profile, which provides baseline intelligence to inform the broad shape and content of the programme. For example, 73 different languages are spoken by the families of Cathays' pupils, which immediately indicated ESOL classes as a priority, and strongly suggested a need for digital skills support. Similarly, the high proportion of low-income families suggested that many adults were likely to benefit from help with budgeting and managing the cost of living. Almost 85.9% of families are from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community. Alongside 61% children are under the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) supervision.

Developing the curriculum:

Family learning at Cathays offers a holistic programme of activities for adult learners which integrates learning to support children's education and engage effectively with the school system with essential skills (literacy, numeracy and digital), employability skills and skills for wider wellbeing such as physical and mental health and family finances. Essential skills are offered both as subjects in their own right and embedded in the other courses. Almost all family learning learners are enrolled on ESOL courses. The range and focus of the adult learning opportunities that are offered has evolved and grown with the coordinator's deepening understanding of learners' needs and interests, from an initial group that was set up to develop the skills of parents and carers to support children's reading. Recent sessions include accredited and non accredited sessions as:

- School admissions support
- Job application support
- Guidance on CV and interview skills
- Signposting for outside agencies
- ESOL
- Improving confidence
- Parent and child wellbeing
- Childcare skills
- Digital skills (Microsoft Word/spreadsheets)
- Numeracy skills (Budgeting)
- Creative skills
- Healthy cookery
- Yoga
- Driving Theory for ESOL learners
- Immunisation community champion project
- Coffee afternoon



Key to this broad and varied curriculum offer has been the development of collaborative delivery partnerships with a range of local learning providers, public services, third sector organisations and businesses. This enables the school to access funding and expertise, while at the same time working with partners to shape provision which is tailored to the needs of local families. For instance:

- Many of the courses are delivered by Adult Learning Cardiff, Adult Learning Wales and Cardiff Metropolitan University through their adult learning budgets and they make use of local authority venues including libraries and community centres.
- Workshops on a variety of topics have been delivered with partners in the third sector and public sector. These include diabetes awareness with Diabetes UK, and dental health, smoking cessation, immunisation awareness and healthy eating with Public Health Wales.
- Other organisations who support the school are EYST, TMR, Cruse, Food4all, BAWSO and Welsh Women's Aid.
- Local supermarkets donate food for healthy eating workshops, as well as providing support for the breakfast club and cookery classes. Food4all significantly contributes through their volunteer project.

Where gaps in existing provision are identified, the coordinator works with partners to address these. For example, a new multilingual food hygiene course, to be delivered in English, Bengali and Urdu, is being developed in partnership with the local authority and will target women who would like to work in catering and hospitality.

Similarly, the community wanted to be independent in driving skills. But they needed to pass the theory so they started the driving theory using the library facilities.

Most delivery takes place face-to-face in community venues in key neighbourhoods where target families live, including Cathays Library, Grange Pavilion and EYST in Butetown.

Engaging families:

Learner engagement takes place through a mix of targeted and universal approaches. The coordinator's role is critical for engaging learners, as they act as a trusted intermediary between both the school and its families and the school and the local community.

Targeted engagement focuses on the parents and carers of children enrolled at Cathays who have low levels of attainment in English and maths. In the first instance, they are invited to join a workshop to develop their skills to support their children's learning. This provides an opportunity for the Family Learning Coordinator to informally identify any adult learning needs, provide information about opportunities, and encourage individuals to participate.

While these families are the primary target group for family learning, the programme is also offered both to other families in the school and to members of the wider community.



This universal approach involves the promotion of each term's family learning programme via a range of methods including the school website, social media, libraries, other local schools, and community organisations in touch with potential learners (e.g. a local Bangladeshi women's organisation). When a child joins the school, parents and carers automatically receive information about family learning opportunities.

The Parent Learning Group has been running for more than ten years and has a strong local reputation. Consequently, word of mouth now also acts as a powerful mechanism for disseminating information about family learning opportunities and building interest and motivation among potential learners.

To help tackle the wider barriers to participation that some individuals face, the school has built strong relationships with local agencies and support organisations including the Cardiff Parenting Team and charities working in areas such as domestic violence, homelessness and food poverty. Where a need is identified, learners are signposted to appropriate support. Nevertheless, the school recognises that it still has more to do to reach adults from some communities and engage them in family learning, in particular Somali and Czech Roma.

Supporting progression:

Supporting progression for adults to further learning and employment is a key aim of family learning at Cathays. Since the programme began almost 50 women have been supported into work and volunteering roles. The coordinator takes a personalised, strengths-based approach to planning progression. This involves identifying, valuing and making explicit to individual learners their existing skills and experience, understanding their aspirations, and building on these foundations to develop personal confidence and identify learning needs and progression opportunities.



“I'm pretty sure that people are low in confidence because they can't identify their own skills. So, the moment you start making them believe that, yes, you have quality, yes, you have a skill – it's about identifying those skills.”

**Christina Roy, Family Learning Coordinator, Parent Learning Group,
Cathays High School.**

Where possible, entry pathways into employment are identified for individuals which are grounded in skills that they already have. This approach both helps to build confidence and motivation and means that learners progress quite quickly once specific gaps in skills and qualifications have been addressed. For example, women with domestic cooking skills are supported to gain food hygiene qualifications which means they can work in catering and other food industries. Similarly, the fact that learners are not first-language English speakers is reframed as a strength, providing opportunities to access multilingual jobs.



“I always highlight the language skills they have. If somebody speaks Urdu, Bengali, or Arabic, I will focus on that skill and make sure they have an employment route with that skill. So that's their strongest point. They just need to upskill themselves in ESOL. And then using both the skills they need to look for jobs. So, there's jobs like caring sector, bilingual teaching assistants or lunchtime supervisor.”

**Christina Roy, Family Learning Coordinator, Parent Learning Group,
Cathays High School.**

A range of personalised support is provided to help all learners to move on from the Parent Learning Group to further learning and/or employment or volunteering. Again, partnerships with other agencies and organisations are critical to this process.

- At the end of each term, the school facilitates a family learning careers meet which brings in external partners including Careers Wales, Cardiff and Vale College, Cardiff Metropolitan University, EWC, the local council and employment agencies in relevant sectors.
- Learners needing employability skills support are referred to appropriate provision or external providers are brought in to deliver bespoke activities (e.g. interview skills) through the Parent Learning Group.
- For learners wishing to progress to FE college provision, the coordinator arranges guided group visits so that they can see what to expect and are supported with first steps such as enrolment and getting their student ID card.
- In some cases, joining a family learning course at the college provides an interim step for learners who need to progress to external provision at a slower pace.
- University visits have been arranged to Cardiff Higher Education Institutions and further afield, to raise awareness among parents and carers of what university life could be like, both for their child and for themselves.
- Where personal circumstances such as age, health or caring responsibilities mean that learners are not able to progress into work, they are supported to access further learning or volunteering.

Once learners have progressed from the Parent Learning Group, the coordinator remains in touch with them and acts as a source of information and signposting to support further progression for as long as this is needed.



Adult Community Learning

- Literacy skills
- Numeracy skills
- Digital skills
- Life skills
- Improved confidence

School

- Health and wellbeing
- Attendance, behaviour and attainment
- Qualifications



Family Learning model

Further learning & employment

- Pathways to further learning
- Increased job opportunities
- Volunteering opportunities
- Improved quality of life
- Personal growth & development
- Stronger family relationships

Community support

- Access to information & guidance
- Signposting community services
- Reduced isolation
- Partnership and collaboration with third sector organisations & local public services
- Providing facilities to learn
- Inspiration and opportunities to learn

2025 Parent Learning Group, Family Learning Model



Supporting progression:

Evaluation and review are carried out at every four months to capture evidence of impact and inform the future development of the programme. The evaluation approach consists of three strands:

- Sampling data every term on children whose parents attend the Parent Learning Group to identify their progress in three different aspects (attendance, behaviour and attainment. Data is monitored on attainment for English, maths and Science to explore improvement and if there is a link to the participation of an adult family member as they support their children at home.
- Measuring adult achievement of qualifications and progression to further learning, employment and volunteering.
- Developing case studies to capture progression at the level of the family, including wider outcomes in areas such as health and wellbeing.




Links and resources:

[Estyn Inspection Report: Cathays High School 2022](#)

Learning Pembrokeshire: Springboard Project



Find out more about
the project: 



Highlights:

- Co-funded by the adult learning service and participating schools.
- Schools recognise and value family learning as a powerful model for engaging families in their children's education and the life of the school.
- Family learning activities are delivered through innovative and ambitious projects using a combination of workshops and courses that vary in length from 2- 6 weeks. There is a strong focus on developing learners' practical and creative skills and having fun whilst embedding essential skills; outdoor learning is a key element of the programme.
- Multiply funding was secured from May 2023 - Feb 2025 to extend and strengthen Springboard's adult learning opportunities so that adult learners could be supported to achieving accredited learning outcomes, progress towards essential skills provision and have support to address wider barriers to education and work.

Overview of the provision:

- Springboard provides opportunities for families to take part in ambitious, creative and practical learning activities which promote adults' engagement with their children's school and education. It is a partnership between Learning Pembrokeshire, the county council's adult learning service, and local schools. Originally established as a Communities First project, the programme is now funded directly by participating schools. Each school pays £9,000 p.a. and receives one day a week of family learning activities for the year.
- The schools' contribution pays for a Springboard Advisor to work with the school, family learning tutors and resources. The Springboard coordinator's post is funded through Learning Pembrokeshire's core adult learning grant from Welsh Government.
- Springboard was successful in its application for Multiply funding to enhance and extend the provision so that its reach could be widened, and its work could develop a programme of adult only activities to complement its family learning offer.



- Family learning activities are delivered in the host school using a bespoke family learning model combining workshops with courses of varying lengths. The amount of time that adults and children spend learning together varies based on what is considered to be appropriate for the children in each age group. In practice, this means that younger children spend less time in the workshops, and the commitment increases for Key Stage 2 pupils.

With Multiply funding, Springboard was able to extend its reach to working with 16 primary schools in Pembrokeshire. Prior to this, the programme has delivered some activity with families of Year 7 pupils in secondary school. Any adult family member of a child in the school can take part. Before Multiply funding around 700 adult learners were engaged each year – approximately 100 per school. With Multiply funding, engagement levels rose to over 1,500 adults.

Identifying need:

Learning Pembrokeshire identifies target schools for participation in Springboard, using local data on school roll numbers and entitlement to free school meals. Schools are then approached and invited to join the programme. Participating schools tend to be located in areas of the county which experience high levels of poverty and wider disadvantage. They are grappling with a range of challenges that impact on children's learning and attainment and looking for a positive way to connect with families. Schools value the Springboard project for its ability to engage families that they identify as needing support. Children may be struggling in class and exhibiting poor attendance and behaviour, which teachers appreciate can be linked to complex family issues and limited support with learning at home. Head teachers recognise that family learning offers a way of engaging with families that has potential to exert leverage on addressing the root causes of low attainment in the child's home environment. In the wake of the pandemic, schools were especially keen to reach and engage parents, many of whom had very little contact with their child's school during the period of disruption and may not have been onto school premises for a considerable time.

Developing the curriculum:

A bespoke programme of workshops and courses is developed for each school by its Family Learning Advisor in consultation with school leaders. In all cases, provision is mapped against the Curriculum for Wales, which guides the planning and development of each workshop/course. The aim is to ensure that activities are relevant and support children and adult family members to develop the attributes outlined in the four core purposes of the Curriculum for Wales.



“All those things that the Curriculum for Wales is trying to do for children, we try and do for families.”

Springboard coordinator

In addition, senior managers in individual schools can identify topics that they would like to see incorporated into their programme, which reflect priorities within their school action plan. For example, schools have requested provision which focuses on school values, maths, oracy, outdoor learning, Welsh language and digital competency.



The workshops are designed to appeal to a range of interests among adult family members. They offer the opportunity to participate in engaging and creative activities such as Lego robotics, pottery, building, bushcraft and cooking, while contributing to ambitious projects. Over the last 2 years for example, Springboard learners have helped build 4 roundhouses, 2 board walks and create numerous large scale murals and mosaics to improve the outdoor learning environments of their partner schools. Essential skills are embedded into Springboard's provision in a way that is both creative and contextualised.

Following the pandemic Springboard concentrated on developing activities to support children's oracy skills as this was widely recognised as an area of pressing need following the pandemic. Through its Multiply funding, Springboard's focus shifted towards upskilling both parents and children in maths skills using a creative approach that brought real life maths into workshops whilst supporting parents to progress onto accredited learning, volunteering and employment pathways.

Engaging families:

Once a school has joined Springboard, an initial launch event is held at the end of a school day which offers a variety of free taster workshops and is open to all. Springboard staff promote this event via school assemblies and school applications such as Class Dojo and SeeSaw. Adults who engage at the launches enrol in the first instance on a one-off, two-hour workshop which is timed to coincide with start or finish of the school day.

The hook for engagement is the creative, fun and hands on elements that underpins each workshop. Some schools have wanted to engage explicitly around a particular essential skill from the outset, particularly reading, but experience shows that uptake is more limited when this approach is used. The programme does both universal and targeted family engagement. Universal promotion via the launch event is carried out first, as this avoids stigmatising families. Flyers promoting new activities are shared every half term via the use of school apps like Class Dojo and parents are able to book onto courses using a Microsoft link or by texting/phoning Springboard staff.

When the project is well established and proving popular with all families, the Springboard Advisor then makes targeted contact with families the school would particularly like the project to engage with, and when courses are oversubscribed Springboard staff liaise with school Family Liaison Officers to see who the school would like to prioritise from all those who have expressed an interest.

Adults wishing to join a workshop/course register their interest through an online form. Demand for places is usually high, so Advisors aim to allocate them as fairly as possible.



“It’s not first come, first served, because that wouldn’t be fair in some cases. Some people are not on their phones to be able to respond straight away. So, for example, we say, OK let’s ensure because it’s our first term in that school, that we give every child an opportunity to do something with their parent as a priority. And then we look at giving different adults an opportunity, and then adults with different siblings.”

Family Learning Advisors manage waiting lists for each workshop. If a course becomes full, the online form indicates this and offers the opportunity to join a waiting list.

When adults have completed one workshop, Springboard aims to try and build the level of commitment, so that they progress to a course that runs over two to four sessions. This approach recognises the need to offer small steps for adults who are new to learning and may not be confident or may have reservations about taking part.

The capacity of the Springboard family learning team to deliver on a scale to meet demand is an on-going challenge. The model of one-off workshops/short term courses is intensive as each needs its own marketing and promotion materials and enrolment form, and up to eight workshops can be delivered per half term in each school.

The new Family Liaison Officer roles within schools have been identified as a potential source of additional capacity, with officers working in partnership with Springboard staff to support the development and delivery of provision.

Delivery taking place in schools is key to engaging parents, because it is a local, familiar and trusted setting. At the same time, the fact that Springboard is somewhat separate from and independent of the school may make parents more willing to take part.

Supporting progression:

Springboard is a model for family engagement and schools are motivated to fund it because they believe it will have an impact on their pupils. With financial pressures on schools, head teachers find it difficult to fund activities explicitly to deliver outcomes for adults. It is also the case that building up the relationships of trust that would be necessary for Family Learning Advisors to have meaningful conversations with adults about their learning needs is unlikely to be achieved through one or two workshops.

To address these challenges Springboard secured additional funding from Multiply to offer a wider range of family learning opportunities and provide more support for adult learning and progression.



Through Multiply funding Springboard was able to offer accredited and non-accredited family learning activities with embedded maths in schools to create a progression route from Springboard's informal provision to accredited essential skills embedded in family learning. This Multiply funded provision also enabled staff to dedicate time to offering 1:1 information, advice and guidance (IAG) for adults to explore next steps and make referrals or signpost to further learning provision, employability support and support with addressing wider needs such as health and housing via links with the Pembrokeshire Family Support Network.

Evaluating impact:

Springboard has proved to be a highly effective approach through which schools can engage with their families. Schools where it is offered, recognise its value and head teachers report that it has created a culture of family engagement throughout the school.

Tutors collect self-reported outcomes for each workshop from adults and children, using questionnaires which include specific questions mapped to the four purposes of learning in the Curriculum for Wales. The current orientation of Springboard towards engagement means that data collated from learners has focused on how the activities have enabled them to become more confident, have more skills, be more motivated and feel more connected with their child's educational journey.

Going forward, Springboard staff are hopeful that they will be able to build on the success of its Multiply funded work and increase its partnership working with other organisations able to support learners with progression.

For clear, strong and relevant progression pathways to be created on a grand scale for learners, strong, flexible and responsive partnership working is going to be key.

Adult Learning Partnership Swansea



Find out more about the partnership:



Highlights:

- Delivery takes place in primary schools. Family learning is integral to schools' approach to engaging and supporting families.
- A focus on oracy is embedded across family learning in primary schools.
- Bespoke, community-based provision for families with specific and complex needs is developed in partnership with third sector organisations and public services.
- The Adult Learning Partnership Swansea (ALPS) maps and supports progression routes for adults from family learning to a wide range of provision including essentials skills, Communities for Work, vocational training and higher education.

Overview of the provision:

The Adult Learning Partnership Swansea delivers family learning in primary schools. Courses run for either a full year (30 weeks) or a single term (ten weeks). Shorter bespoke courses are also delivered in the community. The local authority's Lifelong Learning Service leads on family learning within the Partnership. It currently employs dedicated family learning tutors and brings in expertise from across the Partnership to support delivery. The work is funded by the Lifelong Learning Service's adult learning grant. It has drawn down funding for specific provision from the Pupil Development Grant in some schools.

Family learning is well supported by the host schools and referenced in school development plans. Family learning forms part of a wider approach to addressing the gaps it has left in children's learning and development and a strong focus on oracy is embedded across primary school provision. Support for adults' progression in learning and work is built into the programme from the first contact, and progression pathways mapped across the Partnership offer opportunities up to and including community-based higher education.



Identifying need:

Schools identify which cohort to prioritise and what the focus of provision should be, based on their understanding of the needs of pupils and their families. Delivery in primary schools is mainly with the families of children in the Foundation Phase, as schools have found that this group has the most pressing need for support in the aftermath of the pandemic. Many children are behind in developing their speech and skills to interact with their peers, while parents have had little opportunity to build a relationship with the school.

Community-based provision has generally been developed in response to requests from community groups in touch with families who have complex and specific support needs. For instance, family learning was offered as part of a wider programme of support to families in Swansea's African migrant community and included activities to develop adults' awareness and understanding around topics including safeguarding and the Curriculum for Wales.

Developing the curriculum:

Family learning courses are developed in partnership between schools and tutors, with a dual focus on supporting the learning of both children and adults. The family learning programme for primary schools is based around building adults' skills and understanding around how children learn, while also providing opportunities for learners to develop their own essential skills. In recent years the provision has developed an oracy focus, in response to the identification by Swansea's school advisers of specific local difficulties with children's oracy skills development. Oracy is now prioritised and embedded throughout delivery and is typically the first skill area that is worked in a family learning course, followed by reading, writing and maths. Digital skills development is also embedded. The programme is Agored Cymru accredited.

Sessions are structured in two parts. First, adults learn together, gaining knowledge and skills linked to what their children are learning in school, and with some sessions addressing their own essential skills. Then, children join in for the second part of the session, so that adults can try out the new skills they have learned and use any resources or materials that they have created.

Family Learning tutors bring in adult learning tutors from across the Partnership to support delivery through activities that will be fun and enjoyable and add variety to the learning experience. This approach also helps to develop adults' awareness of other learning opportunities that are available to them beyond family learning.

Bespoke provision can also be developed to respond to particular needs. For instance, schools which have a high proportion of families on low incomes were supporting food banks but realised that many parents and carers did not have the skills to use the food they were supplying. The family learning team was asked if they could help by developing provision which focused on cookery and healthy eating. This has been done in partnership with an adult community learning cookery tutor who is also a schoolteacher, and part-funded through the local authority's Poverty Support Grant. Other local schools have subsequently requested similar courses.



The Partnership is keen to expand provision but faces a challenge in being able to recruit suitably qualified tutors to replace those who have retired. Ideally, it is looking for practitioners with a mix of primary or secondary teaching experience and essential skills, together with the ability to cover digital literacy. Crucially, they also need to be able to work in "other people's environments." The ability to draw on the breadth of expertise within the Partnership has helped to create new opportunities for delivery. For instance, the family learning team has been unable to recruit a Welsh medium tutor, but by working with Gower College Swansea has identified a Welsh-speaking tutor who can deliver family learning in Welsh medium schools.

Engaging families:

Initial engagement is typically through a taster session which all families in the target cohort are invited to attend, to find out more about how their child learns in school. This universal approach avoids stigmatising individual families.

School will do some subtle targeting, in the form of making parents aware of the provision and encouraging them to go for the benefit of the child, and delivery partners in other council services and third sector organisations that are in touch with families in the target cohort may also signpost potential learners to the programme.

The fact that engagement activity and at least some delivery takes place in schools is seen as a critical factor in the success of the programme. It helps to position family learning as part of school life and gives it credibility in the eyes of parents and carers. Schools are good at engaging families and courses tend to be over-subscribed.

Supporting progression:

Progression for adults is built into the programme from the outset. Once adults are engaged through the hook of supporting their children's learning, the family learning tutors informally assess their skills and needs through chatting, watching how they interact with their children, offer free writing activities and generally get to know them and build rapport and trust.



This leads naturally to discussions during the course about what learning and skills development they would like to do next. On the whole, adults seem more comfortable with disclosing their own learning needs to a practitioner who is connected with the school but outside of it.

The Partnership planning processes are critical for mapping out progression routes from family learning, particularly to other provision offered by the Lifelong Learning Service and the other key partners (Adult Learning Wales, Gower College Swansea and Swansea University), and for identifying any gaps that need to be addressed. The service ensures that family learning tutors have a sound understanding of the progression routes from the course and the breadth of what is available through the Partnership and beyond. Sharing intelligence about these opportunities is a key focus of team meetings.



“So tutors know that there’s a clear pathway for somebody joining us at possibly Pre entry or Entry 1, who needs support with their reading. We can offer one-to-one sessions to build confidence so that they are able to join a class. We can offer Entry 1 and Entry 2 qualifications in literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. We can progress learners onto Gower College Swansea for the Level 3 if they require the Access course. So we know there is a clear path being offered in the community from Pre entry with lifelong learning up to degree level at Swansea University.”

Towards the end of a course, partners are brought in to speak to learners about what progression opportunities are available. For example:

- Communities for Work mentors talk to parents about employability opportunities. They are routinely invited to deliver a progression talk to learners at the end of the course and some learners have progressed from family learning to essential skills and Communities for Work provision.

The Partnership recognises the multiple barriers to learning that many adults engaged through family learning face, including low confidence in their own educational abilities, poor prior experiences of learning, financial hardship and childcare responsibilities. Therefore, ensuring that progression opportunities are accessible is a key consideration. For instance, some schools have a high proportion of learners with ESOL needs, but due to cultural restrictions women would not be able to attend ESOL classes outside the school, so the family learning team has worked with Gower College Swansea and Adult Learning Wales to develop and deliver ESOL on site. Similarly, Gower College Swansea has delivered Teaching Assistant courses, which are a popular progression route from family learning, in community venues, with adults doing their work placement in their children’s school.



Evaluating impact:

At the end of each course, learners are asked to record on their exit form what they are planning on doing next. This allows the Partnership to capture evidence of intention, although they do not have a systematic approach in place to monitor actual outcomes. While in theory it should be possible to track progression within the Partnership, in practice there is no mechanism in place to do this and concerns about GDPR inhibit data sharing.

The Partnership has developed case studies to capture examples of adult progression to FE, HE and into work.



Wrexham and Flintshire Adult Community Learning Partnership



Find out more about the partnership:



Gogledd Ddwyrain Cymru
Dysgu Cymunedol i Oedolion
Adult Community Learning
North East Wales

Highlights:

- Outdoor learning has been a powerful hook both for encouraging primary schools to participate in family learning and for engaging parents with the programme within schools.
- The Partnership's Family Learning Coordinator links with engagement staff appointed through Community Focused Schools, to ensure that activities are aligned and do not duplicate one another.
- Family learning in secondary schools is targeted and tailored to support individual families with specific issues, such as the transition from English medium primary school to Welsh medium secondary school for pupils from families where Welsh is not spoken.
- CPD for family learning tutors equips them with the skills and knowledge to deliver embedded information, advice and guidance to adults on the programme.
- Partners including Coleg Cambria, Careers Wales, Communities for Work Plus and Reaching Wider deliver progression sessions to learners towards the end of each family learning course to support them to take the next steps in learning or work.

Overview of the provision:

Wrexham and Flintshire Adult Community Learning Partnership works with schools across the two local authorities to deliver a diverse programme of family learning.

Provision in primary schools is well established and creates opportunities for adults and children to learn together with a strong emphasis on the themes of literacy and outdoor learning. Meanwhile, emerging work with secondary schools focuses on adults whose children face challenges in school. Tailored learning is provided to develop specific awareness and understanding so that they can engage more effectively with the school system to support their child. Support for adult progression is embedded across all family learning provision.

The Partnership has used Welsh Government engagement funding to appoint a dedicated coordinator within one of the partner providers who acts as a single point of contact to engage schools.



The coordinator promotes family learning as an approach through which schools can harness adult learning funding to reach and support parents and other adult family members. Outdoor learning has been a powerful hook for securing the interest of both schools and parents in primary schools, with 17 schools currently engaged.

Identifying need:

Schools identify the priorities for their family learning provision – for example reading or ESOL - as they know their families. Once schools are engaged, the family learning coordinator works with them to develop a programme that responds to their needs.

Typically, this will involve a mix of more general courses and some targeted interventions for families whom the school has identified as needing specific support, for example a particular key stage, class, or individual families.

The coordinator is increasingly linking with engagement staff appointed through Community Focused Schools. This is seen as a critical connection for the Partnership as it joins up adult learning funding with another funding stream that can support family learning and ensures that they are complementing rather than duplicating activity. The most effective relationships have been built where there is an appointed family engagement coordinator in the school, rather than where family engagement is an “add-on” to the existing workload of a member of staff.

Developing the curriculum:

Working with providers across the Partnership has enabled the family learning coordinator to bring in a wide range of expertise and resources to create new opportunities and grow the programme.

For instance:

- Groundwork North Wales deliver outdoor learning, which has proved immensely popular.
- The Science Discovery Centre, Wrexham, delivers STEM-focused activities.
- The Active Wrexham team and Aura Leisure and Libraries in Flintshire deliver provision with a sports and family fitness element.

Provision in primary schools aims to have broad appeal and includes elements where adults and children learn together.

Engagement with secondary schools is now developing, and family learning in this context looks very different. It is targeted, bespoke provision, with the emphasis on engaging and supporting individual families identified by the school around specific issues, as the following examples illustrate:

- The Welsh medium transition programme is being developed and delivered in Wrexham in partnership with the National Centre for Learning Welsh. Designed to support pupils' transitions from English medium primary schools to a Welsh medium high school, it is targeted specifically at parents who are not themselves Welsh speakers and is delivered during the spring and summer terms of pupils' final year in key stage 2.



- In Flintshire, provision has been developed in a high school to support ESOL learners who are new arrivals and whose children have joined the school. It was recognised that the families often had very little understanding of the high school model, what and how their children were learning, and issues such as the school's expectations in relation to matter such as attendance, behaviour and homework. The school has used family learning to engage directly with families in a positive way to promote mutual awareness and trust.

Engaging families:

Learners are engaged via the participating schools. It is essential that the staff member within a school who is responsible for family learning has an understanding of community engagement and the skills and experience to work effectively with parents who may have had a difficult relationship with the school. Engagement work, together with the development of the family learning programme for each school, is highly demanding of staff time, particularly while activity is in its early stages.

In primary schools, courses are offered on a general basis to all adult family members through channels such as newsletters and social media, alongside some direct targeting of certain families whom the school believes would benefit most from taking part. Once provision is established, word of mouth from family to family is often the most powerful way of bringing in new learners.



“The numbers have grown because there's nothing like word of mouth from parents chatting with other parents on the playground and things like that.”

Recognising the effectiveness of peer-based engagement, the Partnership is looking at the possibility of developing a parent champions model to formalise this approach.

Outdoor learning has proved to be a highly appealing approach and has been key to driving engagement across Wrexham and Flintshire. By offering sessions based around practical themes such as bicycle repair and woodworking, the Partnership has had notable success in engaging men in family learning. There is high demand from schools and the main constraint on expansion is currently the capacity of delivery partners.

Supporting progression:

In common with all provision that is delivered through the Partnership, progression support for adults on family learning courses is embedded throughout. Partners work together to plan progression, identifying and developing pathways across the whole Partnership. The aim is to support adults to progress from their initial engagement in non-accredited family learning to essential skills and other provision as appropriate to their needs and circumstances.



However, while progression is a priority, it is not directly addressed in the interactions that the coordinator and tutors have with parents at the engagement stage, and initial assessment is done through informal monitoring.



“We've always got the essential skills in our minds with parents. It doesn't matter what they're doing, and we know from the initial engagement, how they fill in a form, for example, tells us a lot about whether they've got literacy needs. Progression is always there.”

This approach reflects the understanding that adults are initially motivated to take part by the idea of doing something for their child, and those who struggle most with their own literacy or maths may also be the most reluctant to confront it at the outset.

As the course progresses and the tutor builds rapport and trust with the learners, this leads to conversations around adults' interests and the skills that they would like to develop. A range of courses delivered in schools such as phonics, food safety and first aid, provide progression to enrolment onto accredited English, maths or digital skills course in the college. From school-based courses, learners may progress to a range of other skills and employability provision, including teaching assistant training and access to HE, facilitated by referrals between partners.



“We're opening up that pathway to parents as they start, so they might start by coming into an engagement activity that might be craft for example, but then it's building that relationship with them week on week.”

The role of tutors is key, and the Partnership ensures that they have the skills and knowledge to deliver embedded information, advice and guidance. All tutors are made aware of the range of progression opportunities from their course and can communicate these to learners and gather intelligence about what further support they need to progress.

Towards the end of a course, depending on what learners need, other partners are invited in to speak to them about progression opportunities and support them to take the next step. Partners involved in this process include Coleg Cambria, Careers Wales, Communities for Work Plus and Reaching Wider. Bespoke progression sessions have been developed where learners need specific support. For example, a group of learners in one school were helped to access ESOL provision, while in another the widening access officer was brought in to talk to individuals wishing to progress to HE.



Evaluating impact:

The key outcome of interest to schools is that adults are more involved in their children's education and are willing to come into the school, and the Partnership works with schools to capture evidence of this. Developing an approach to tracking progression from family learning to other provision is underway, as part of their wider work to develop a Partnership-wide management information system (MIS).



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Appendix A: What difference does family learning make?

Studies into the outcomes of Family Learning consistently show that its distinctive strength lies in the two-fold benefits it can deliver, simultaneously contributing to positive outcomes for both adults and children. As an early intervention and prevention approach, it works in reaching disadvantaged families and communities to improve their life chances and has an important role to play in breaking cycles of intergenerational disadvantage. Learning together can strengthen communication and improve relationships and wellbeing within families.

Evidence on the impact of Family learning identifies the following outcomes for children:

- Improved educational attainment.
- Improved school attendance.
- Improved behaviour.
- Increased motivation.
- Increased confidence.

Meanwhile, the following outcomes are identified for adults:

- Improved educational attainment.
- Improved employability skills (e.g. communication skills).
- Progression in education and employment.
- Increased motivation.
- Increased confidence.
- Increased social and cultural capital and stronger social networks.
- Improved parental confidence and parenting skills.

Family learning also has a positive impact on local service delivery, by increasing the engagement of both children and adults with learning. It can act as a powerful hook for re-engaging adults in learning, thereby supporting the efforts of adult learning providers to reach and engage those who face barriers to access and who experience significant disadvantage in relation to learning, skills and employment. At the same time, schools report benefits from increased parental engagement and support for children's learning, and this may help to raise educational attainment.

Appendix B: Policy context for the development of the Wales Family Learning Framework

Family learning has the potential to play an important role in supporting the delivery of a range of policy priorities for Wales (see Figure 1 below). Recognising and articulating these linkages strengthens the case that providers and stakeholders can make with local and national funders and decision-makers to value, support and promote family learning.

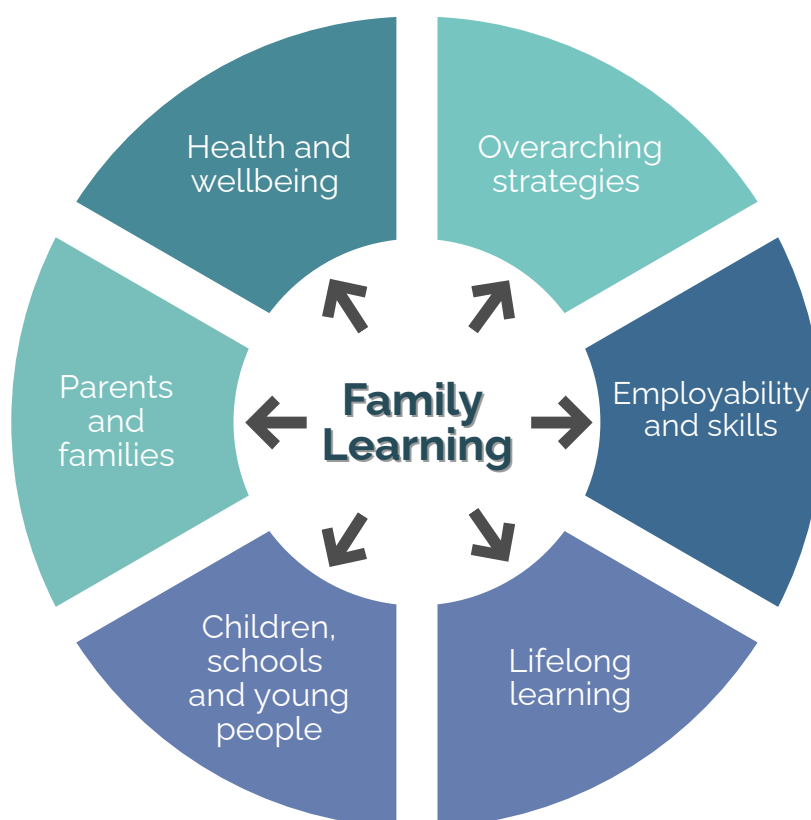


Figure 1: Family learning key links to national policy priorities.

Key policies under each of these themes that overlap with family learning are outlined below.

Overarching strategies:

Wellbeing of Future Generations

Several of the current national indicators (updated 2021) relate to subjects that are of interest to family learning, including: adult qualification levels; participation in education, employment and training for different age groups; childhood development; family wellbeing; children's educational attainment; and digital inclusion.

Programme for Government 2021-6

A number of the objectives, commitments and associated actions set out in the updated Programme for Government aim to tackle educational inequalities, raise standards, and promote educational progression and employability for children, young people and adults, and to strengthen the role of parents, families and schools. As part of the approach to addressing disadvantage, it is proposed to expand early years and childcare provision. There will also be greater investment in the learning environment of community schools, with the co-location of key services and a focus on securing stronger engagement with parents and carers outside traditional hours. Lifelong learning will be further encouraged through measures including the expansion of Personal Learning Accounts, the Union Learning Fund and all-age apprenticeships, and delivery of the Young Person's Guarantee.

A review undertaken by L&W in 2021 shows that adult learning has the potential to contribute across the range of objectives of the Programme for Government. Family learning can play an important role in supporting this, as an engagement, participation and progression route back into learning for adults, particularly those with negative experiences of initial education,

Anti-Racist Action Plan 2023

The Plan sets out the measures that the government will take towards making Wales an anti-racist nation. It stresses the intention to adopt a new and explicitly anti-racist approach, to address the structural ways that racism is perpetuated through policies and practices across all areas of government and service delivery in the public, private and third sectors.

Detailed actions are proposed to embed anti-racism across policy areas. To address educational inequalities, as well as contributing to the wider aim of promoting an anti-racist society, anti-racist culture and practice will be embedded within every FE and adult learning provider. The Plan focuses on the experiences, opportunities and outcomes of both learners and the education workforce, and includes actions to embed anti-racism in the post-16 curriculum. Specific measures are proposed to tackle structural and systemic racism within employability and skills programmes which prevent people from accessing training and progressing in work. Through a focus on childcare and play settings, the Plan also aims to embed anti-racism in actions to address inequalities in early years attainment and better support parents and care-givers to promote children's development.

Development of the co-created Family Learning Framework is referenced as an action in relation to addressing racism in employability programmes.

Employability and skills:

Stronger, Fairer, Greener Wales

A National employment and skills plan which sets out policy and investment priorities for Welsh Government and expectations of partners and others within the wider employability and skills system. The strategy aims to support post-Covid economic and social recovery, ensuring fair and equal access for all citizens to high quality education, training and jobs, while achieving transition to net zero. Key commitments include:

- The Young Person's Guarantee, to enable everyone under the age of 25 to access an offer of work, education, training, or self-employment.
- Supporting adults into employment, by prioritising and consolidating Welsh Government led national employability support and targeting resources towards those under-represented in the labour market.
- Tackling educational inequalities and raising standards and levels of qualification, both in relation to schools and through increasing participation in education and skills development across the lifecourse.

Medr

Established under the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act, Medr has responsibility for the strategy, funding and oversight of:

- Further education (FE), including colleges and school sixth-forms.
- Higher education (HE), including research and innovation.
- Adult education and adult community learning.
- Apprenticeships and training.

Medr will take forward the strategic vision for tertiary education and research in Wales to create a joined up system which contributes to national prosperity by raising skills levels and tackling inequality, so that everyone can access the learning they need.

Children, schools and young people:

Community Focused Schools

As part of Welsh Government's wider commitment to tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment, the development of Community Focused Schools is being promoted in all schools across Wales. Grounded in the principle that family and community, as well as schools, play a key role in supporting children's development, Community Focused Schools are expected to:

- Build a strong partnership with families.
- Respond to the needs of their community.
- Collaborate effectively with other services, including co-location of services in schools.

Family learning is explicitly identified as a feature of effective Community Focused Schools, particularly programmes which support parents to develop confidence to support their children's learning at home.

Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF)

Refreshed following consultation with young people and stakeholders in 2021, the YEPF aims to provide a systematic approach for identifying and supporting young people aged 11-18 who are at risk of becoming "not in education, employment or training" (NEET) or who are NEET and are at risk of becoming homeless. It seeks to prevent poverty and homelessness by helping young people to stay in education or training and fulfil their potential.

Parents and families:

Flying Start

Launched in 2007, Flying Start aims to support families with children under four years old in disadvantaged areas of Wales. It is delivered by local authorities within the defined geographical areas and is one of Welsh Government's flagship programmes. The core elements of the programme include a range of interventions that have been shown to influence positive outcomes for children and their families. These include:

- Part-time childcare for two to three year olds.
- An enhanced Health Visiting service.
- Access to parenting programmes.
- Support for children to learn to talk and communicate.

The parenting support element is based on the recognition that parents play a central role in relation to outcomes for children. It aims enhance the skills of parents to support their child's development, care and wellbeing and to help them to relate positively to their child. Parenting support aims to include a diverse offer which reflects the range of types, duration and intensity of support that parents may need. Delivery guidance stresses that provision should be based on the principle of working in partnership with parents to build and sustain positive, respectful relationships and help them to develop self-confidence in their parenting role.

Child Poverty Strategy for Wales 2024

The strategy sets the direction for Welsh Government actions to tackle child poverty over the next decade or more and to meet our ambitions for children and young people in Wales, no matter what their circumstances or background. It also provides a framework to maximise the levers we have at our disposal to make our contribution to eradicating child poverty. The strategy seeks to ensure stronger integration across our national policies, programmes and action plans and to support collaboration at the regional and local levels. This will deliver our ambition to achieve greater equity of experience and outcome for all children and young people.

Lifelong learning:

Adult Learning Policy Statement 2017

This statement covers the remit of Adult Community Learning providers in receipt of funding from the adult learning grant. It sets out how adult learning contributes to the delivery of Taking Wales Forward, with the stated aim of helping to 'support adults to play an active role in the economy and society through the provision of enhanced learning opportunities.' The policy has a broad scope, including:

- Developing skills to gain and progress in sustainable paid work as a route out of poverty.
- Improving individual health and wellbeing.
- Promoting social engagement and community integration.

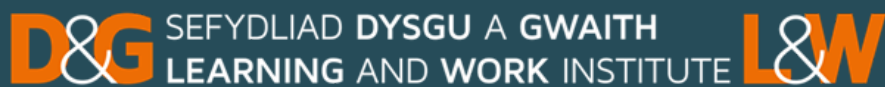
There is an expectation that provision funded through the adult learning grant will have clear planned learning outcomes related to learning progression, employability progression, and improved social integration. Providers are expected to plan collaboratively and prioritise. Family learning is included in the scope of provision that can be funded through the adult learning grant, under the category of engagement and “hook” courses, although priority is given to literacy, numeracy, digital skills and ESOL.

Health and wellbeing:

Working Together for a Healthier Wales (2023)

The long-term strategy (2023–35) of Public Health Wales sets out priorities for action with the aim of increasing healthy life expectancy, improving health and wellbeing, and reducing health inequalities. It is contextualised in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic and the on-going cost of living crisis, both of which have exacerbated existing health inequalities and challenges and are likely to have long-term consequences.

The strategy recognises the importance of education and skills, family and community connections and healthy behaviours as essential factors needed for good physical health and mental wellbeing throughout life. It discusses the roots of health inequalities in wider economic and social inequalities, and highlights the ways in which disadvantage leads to the persistence of unequal health outcomes across generations. Arguing for closer collaboration across policy areas, the strategy urges partners from fields including education and skills to work together to contribute to tackling health inequalities.



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