

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru	National Assembly for Wales
Pwyllgor yr Economi, Seilwaith a Sgiliau	Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee
Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer Pwyllgor yr Economi, Seilwaith a Sgiliau	Priorities for the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee
EIS 38 Workers' Educational Association Wales / YMCA Wales Community College	EIS 38 Cymdeithas Addysg y Gweithwyr / Coleg Cymunedol YMCA Cymru



WEA YMCA CC Cymru's response to the National Assembly for Wales Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee's call for evidence on issues for the Fifth Assembly

WEA YMCA CC Cymru

As the all-Wales provider of Adult Learning and a body recognised by Estyn for its high quality, WEA YMCA CC Cymru, following recent mergers, is in a strong position to co-ordinate and facilitate the integration of learning across differing policy portfolios.

In 2014-15 it engaged with 17,000 learners, 55% of whom were in the top four deciles of deprivation. Specialising in providing learning opportunities in the community and in the workplace, the organisation works in partnership with local, regional and national bodies in the statutory, private and third sectors. It provides access to education from entry level units and basic skills qualifications to higher level courses for adults from all backgrounds, but with a particular focus on those who have missed out on learning or for those who need a second chance.

Issues for the Committee to consider in the Fifth Assembly

1. Now is the time to recognise the power of lifelong learning as a means of achieving a vibrant economy and sustainable communities. It is crucial to nurture the skill of learning over a lifetime to secure informed, flexible, intelligent and healthy workforces and communities. The economic, social and civic advantages of developing a truly lifelong learning society in Wales will be profound. It will give us the cutting edge that we need for our communities to be resilient, for our economy to adapt to changing circumstances, and for our democracy to thrive. We urge the new Committee to consider a broader, co-ordinated approach to lifelong learning and the rebalancing of education opportunities across life stages.

2. Adult Learning makes a significant contribution to a range of cross-departmental policy objectives. When underpinned by a broad curriculum offer, adult learning: tackles ignorance and prejudice, supports a bilingual Wales, develops understanding and tolerance, encourages health and well-being, inspires active citizenship, promotes social justice and poverty reduction, and supports economic regeneration. In light of the above, the new Committee should consider a new funding strategy for adult learning.

3. Adult Learning is currently offered through programmes stemming from several Governmental Departments: Local Government, People and Communities, Health and Social Care, as well as the Department for Education and Skills. With limited public resources and an agreed need to focus on

integrating service provision, we believe that the Committee should consider a co-ordinated approach that would: prevent the duplication of activities, reduce expenditure for administration, support the delivery of complementary and effective learning opportunities and ensure a more cost-efficient, modular system which allows for the transfer of skills attainment across programmes. Endorsing a single, all-Wales body for the co-ordinated delivery of Adult Learning could be considered to: provide strategic direction and consistency of quality nationally, prioritise a needs based delivery model and maximise delivery at the local and regional level in conjunction with key partnerships.

4. It would be timely for the new Committee to consider rebalancing the distribution of resources more equitably across the different life stages: to avoid the frontloading of the education system, in order to provide opportunities for learning when and where they are needed, to respond to an ageing population and changing patterns of paid and unpaid work, and to equip adults with the learning and skills they need to thrive in a challenging economic environment. In a world of new challenges, constantly changing careers and increased dependency on the third sector and volunteering, it is vital for the long-term well-being of individuals, their communities and the economy that all adults are given the chance to embrace lifelong learning.

5. The disparity in educational spending between younger and older adults has increased since Niace's study in 2009 showing that 86% of the total was spent on 18-24 year old adults. Despite the above mentioned social, economic and demographic trends Adult Community Education has suffered substantial cuts in recent years (37.5% to the Adult Community Education budget in 2014-15 followed by a further small cut in 2015-16). Uncertainty concerning the replacement of substantial EU funding is also a major concern.

6. In the context of Welsh Government's 2012 Welsh Language Strategy 'A living language: a language for living', any discussion on skills and the economy should consider the further development of a bilingual economy and the role of vocational, workplace and community education in promoting bilingual workplaces, standards of bilingual customer service and language awareness.

7. The role of vocational and community education in promoting entrepreneurship skills is another vital element that should be considered as a key part of linking education and business support schemes.

8. For our comparatively young Welsh democracy, its communities and economy to reach their full potential, much more awareness is needed of the Welsh political and institutional decision-making landscape. The Bevan Foundation (August 2016) in an article on a post-Brexit Wales has suggested that we need a "a re-invigorated democracy, which ensures people have a strong voice in decisions that affect them". The role of community education in particular should be considered - especially in promoting democratic debate, the understanding of issues and supporting individuals and groups to contribute to their communities and participate in democratic processes.

9. Similarly, Adult Education's role in promoting sustainable practices and adopting new technology should be mapped.

10. In order to maximise the potential of the Welsh economy it is vital that vocational and Adult Education curriculums and vocational standards are not only in tune with Welsh economic, political and cultural priorities but also flexible enough to respond to local situations. It is worth considering to what extent present curriculums and exam board specifications meet these criteria, and whether the time has come to develop specific vocational standards for Wales.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues further with the new Committee.

Dafydd Rhys – 1.9.16

07887954301

dafydd.rhys@weacymru.org.uk