

University and College Union

To HESC, FESC & Council

From Bethan Winter

Date 11/12 October 2019

Agenda Item

For Information and decision

Subject Adult Community Learning (ACL): A Manifesto Priority

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) contend that education must be regarded as a human right for all throughout life with adult learning being a 'core component of lifelong learning ... whereby those regarded as adults by the society in which they live develop and enrich their capabilities for living and working'.¹

UCU Wales supports this position and believe that Adult Community Learning (ACL) makes a positive difference to the people, communities and society in Wales. A key and vital strength of ACL is its focus and ability to engage with vulnerable and hard to reach individuals and groups enabling them to (re)engage in learning in a supportive, flexible and safe environment. ACL provides a wide array of learning opportunities to individuals including basic and life skills, independent living skills, personal development and skills for work. It provides opportunities for individuals to acquire new skills, achieve qualifications, progress onto further learning pathways, or directly into employment or volunteering. ACL has a positive impact on wider economic and community-related outcomes including health and wellbeing, social inclusion, community cohesion and can assist in tackling poverty.² The post 16 education sector has and can continue to play a critical role in developing and delivering Adult Community Learning to bring about positive outcomes for individuals and communities in Wales.

However, in recent years ACL has suffered significant cutbacks being hit particularly badly by austerity. The ACL sector in Wales has come under severe pressure as a result of these funding cuts. Provision has contracted across Wales and has been severely eroded in some areas. Reductions in funding of the Community Learning Grant and part-time funding in FE have resulted in the decimation of ACL resulting in far fewer opportunities available for adult learners in the community. These cutbacks have been compounded by other issues identified within ACL relating to the way in which it is planned, funded and delivered including: (i) inequitable and inconsistent provision across Wales; (ii) significant variability in the quality and effectiveness of ACL Partnerships; (iv) the sector remains relatively unstructured and lacks a clearly defined and common adult learning framework or core curriculum.³

UCU Wales acknowledges that Welsh Government has begun to recognise the crisis within ACL and take action to seek to address some of the issue that exist. It has made an explicit

¹ UNESCO (2014) *Recommendation on Adult Education (2015)*. Available at:

http://www.uil.unesco.org/fileadmin/keydocuments/AdultEducation/Confintea/en/1976RecommendationAdultEducation_Draft_.pdf

² <https://gov.wales/review-adult-community-learning>

³ <https://gov.wales/review-adult-community-learning>

commitment to the principle of a new Welsh Right to Lifelong Learning with community based adult learning being part of this ambition. It has undertaken a consultation on proposals for the restructuring of the delivery and funding of community based adult learning in Wales and has recently outlined a two stage approach to improving the provision of adult learning in Wales - stage one will focus on ensuring that the existing planning and funding is more equitable and accessible while stage two will focus on developing a National Strategic body.⁴ It aligns with the goals of the *Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015)*⁵ to achieve a more equal and prosperous Wales, a country of cohesive communities and a thriving Welsh language. It also links closely to key aims outlined *Taking Wales Forward 2016 -2021*⁶ which is of a Wales that is prosperous and secure, healthy and active, ambitious and learning, united and connected.

While UCU Wales welcomes this action by Welsh Government it wants to ensure not only that Welsh Government delivers on its stated commitment to Adult Community Learning (ACL) but also that this is done in a way that addresses all current issues. UCU Wales is committed to ensuring that ACL is *properly and adequately* funded and that the planning and delivery issues are overcome in order to secure fair and equitable provision of ACL throughout Wales. We will scrutinise and lobby Welsh Government to ensure that that these issues are addressed and that ACL is given the priority it deserves.

This is why we are proposing that Adult Community Learning is a priority issue within our UCU Manifesto for the Welsh Assembly Election in 2021. Taking into account the continued low levels of essential skills and high rates of economic inactivity in many parts of the country, we believe that Wales needs effective ACL provision that engages with the hardest to reach groups, helps change attitudes to learning and offers people a second chance to maximise their potential. ACL can make real differences to people's lives by providing a platform for progression into further learning, training, community engagement and employment. With a renewed focus on vision and strategy, structures, partnerships and quality ACL can continue play a lead role in supporting individuals and communities across Wales in order to secure *Prosperity for All*⁷. UCU Wales is committed to making ACL a human right for ALL people and communities in Wales to access and complete regardless of their circumstances or position in Welsh society. ACL can and must become a core component of the Welsh Right to Lifelong Learning.

Decision:

UCU Wales agrees to:

1. Include Adult Community Learning as a key priority within our Manifesto for the Welsh Assembly Election in 2021.
2. Scrutinise and lobby Assembly Members & Welsh Government to ensure that these issues are addressed and that ACL is given the priority it deserves.
3. Participate in current & future ACL discussions and initiatives in Wales

⁴ <https://gov.wales/written-statement-welsh-government-response-consultation-restructuring-community-based-adult>

⁵ <https://futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/>

⁶ <https://gov.wales/taking-wales-forward-0>

⁷ <https://gweddill.gov.wales/docs/strategies/170919-prosperity-for-all-en.pdf>