



RESPONDING TO RURAL LEARNING NEEDS IN NORTH WALES

Interim Report
of GWLAD Project

July 2007



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1. GENERAL OUTLINE OF THE PROJECT

a) INTRODUCTION

The GWLAD project has been funded through ESF EQUAL 2 funding from Autumn 2004 to December 2007. This interim report (July 2007) is designed to offer a summary of our aims, our main activities to date, and initial conclusions and recommendations. It will be followed by a more detailed final report to be produced at the end of the project in December 2007. This report focuses particularly on activities carried out during Action 2 of the project which took place from summer 2005 to the end of 2007. As this is an interim report it is written as 'work in progress' designed to give a flavour of the activities and findings of the GWLAD project at a point where they are still taking place and evolving. After an initial background section outlining our aims and approach, most of this report consists of descriptions of our activities written by those closely involved with delivering them, outlining what has been taking place and some of the lessons we have learnt.

b) THE GWLAD PARTNERSHIP

The GWLAD project has been carried out by a development partnership working within the EQUAL thematic field of 'adaptability and lifelong learning'. The main focus of our partnership's work has been the promotion of lifelong learning, particularly for those suffering discrimination and inequality in the labour market. Our partnership consists of the following educational, statutory, community, and voluntary agencies.

- School of Lifelong Learning, University of Wales, Bangor.
The School of Lifelong Learning is the lead partner, and has experience of widening participation and adult and continuing education, working across north Wales. The GWLAD project has been able to draw on the experiences and contacts of many of the staff from the school. UWB has had three members of staff working full-time on the GWLAD programme and many other staff of the school have been involved in a range of GWLAD activities.
- CAIS is the main voluntary sector provider of drug and alcohol services in Wales. It has developed programmes for employed and unemployed people that prevent drug related harm, and help people to get and retain employment.

- Medrwn Môn is the umbrella body on Anglesey which provides information and advice on volunteering and represents the voluntary sector.
- BEN (the Black Environment Network) promotes equality of opportunity with respect to ethnic communities in the preservation, protection and development of the environment.
- Bwrdd yr Iaith Gymraeg is a statutory organisation whose main function is to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language.
- The Open University is the largest provider of part-time higher education in the UK and the only one dedicated to distance learning.

All the above partners have been involved in one or more of the activities that are described in the rest of this report. Other GWLAD partners include Chwarae Teg, and Stonewall, who have had valuable input to the GWLAD equal opportunities policy and practice. The Rural Stress Information Network (RSIN) and Alfred McAlpine Slate Ltd. also provided valuable input in the early part of the project.

c) AIMS OF THE PROJECT

The main aim of the project was to provide lifelong learning and experiences relevant to gaining employment. Within this general aim we were particularly interested in the problems faced by those who live in rural areas, especially those who were socially excluded. More specifically we had four main objectives:

- **To develop innovative approaches to lifelong learning.** In this strand of activities we focused on researching the experiences of current learners in rural areas in order to find out what worked and did not work for them. We also tried out new approaches that we considered might be particularly relevant to learners in rural learners. We focused particularly on new technologies and experimented with blended learning, the use of podcasts, and the use of a virtual learning environment in a community location.
- **Empowerment of socially excluded groups.** In this strand of activity we developed community based learning, both formal and informal We worked with a range of target groups including women isolated because of lack of transport and childcare, members of ethnic groups both from established communities and more recent migrants, those experiencing problems because of substance misuse, men from an agricultural background who had experienced

many crises in their industry in recent years, and young people living in isolated areas. We involved these groups in a range of learning activities, generally taking our lead from them as to the kinds of activities they considered to be the most appropriate for them at this particular point. Some of these were linked quite closely to their potential employment needs, but others focused on building community cohesion and/or individual confidence and self-esteem.

- **Learning into employment.** In this strand we focused more directly on activities that linked learning with employment. We looked particularly at the links between volunteering activities and employment, both carrying out research, and providing learning activities for volunteers. We also looked at ways in which one of our target groups – those experiencing drug and alcohol problems could be helped to gain or to remain in employment, and at ways in which those who were already in employment could improve their prospects.
- Our final objective was to keep the principle of **equal opportunities** as an element in all our activities. To ensure this we delivered equality and diversity training to all partners early on in the project.

Although for the purpose of this report we have allocated our activities to one or other of our three main objectives, in practice several of our activities could be seen as fitting into two or even three of the objectives. For instance, the Learning Communities Network has empowered socially excluded groups through working directly with them to develop learning that will improve employment prospects.

d) OUR APPROACH

Our project has included both research and the development of activities. Our approach was generally to carry out research first, and then to develop activities based on what we found from our research. However we also developed activities based on research undertaken in previous projects, such as the SEQUAL project carried out in the school of Lifelong Learning as part of a previous EQUAL programme. In general we used an action research approach which means that our research and our activities were very closely linked. For this reason we have combined descriptions of our research and our activities in the following sections.

In accordance with the EQUAL principle of empowerment we worked as

far as possible in a bottom-up manner, working with groups and individuals to develop the kinds of learning experiences that were most appropriate for them. This was an important feature of the project which differentiated it from other forms of funding where level, type and duration of learning activities are generally far more circumscribed. This also meant that some of the activities we had anticipated at the beginning of the project did not in fact take place, but that we other activities that we had not expected to engage in emerged. In many cases our development work involved seizing opportunities as they arose. The next sections of this report detail many instances of this process. Finally, we also worked in partnership throughout the project. As well as the formal GWLAD partnership, many other agencies have been involved in our activities. All partners already had a wide network of partners and contacts with which they worked. We were able to draw on these during the course of the project, and at times to use each other's contacts. This is one of the most rewarding and fruitful aspects of the project, and underlies our whole approach.

e) THE PRINCIPLES OF EQUAL

The following EQUAL principles have been embedded in GWLAD:

INNOVATION – The GWLAD project has allowed us to innovate and also to react to changing circumstances. An example of this is our work with ethnic groups; when the project was designed in 2004 we anticipated working with established ethnic groups such as the Chinese community, but did not anticipate the needs of new migrants from Eastern Europe. The relative flexibility of EQUAL funding has made it possible for us to develop activities with these groups too. We have also incorporated the EQUAL principle of innovation in our approach to learning with new approaches to method and content being pioneered, for instance in the INNOVATE learning programme outlined later in this report.

EMPOWERMENT – We have attempted to incorporate the principles of empowerment into many aspects of the way we have worked. In particular we have tried not to impose our own views on what constitutes appropriate learning on to individuals and groups but have tried to allow them to decide for themselves what kinds of learning activities are particularly appropriate. This is particularly important as it means that at the end of the project many of the activities will be continued by the groups themselves.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES – We have included an equal opportunities dimension to many of our activities, and tried to ensure that we have, in particular, directed our energies at offering opportunities to individuals and groups who are often socially excluded.

TRANSNATIONALITY – Our work has benefited very much from the transnational element of our project. We have shared experiences of good practice with other EQUAL projects in the Czech Republic, France and Belgium, looking particularly at ways of motivating learners, approaches to accrediting experiential learning, and the advantages and difficulties of e-learning. Our transnational work also included an exchange of staff with a project working in a rural area in the Czech Republic that had many similarities to north Wales.

f) THE NORTH WALES BACKGROUND

In the north west of the region where we carried out most of our work there are high levels of deprivation and poverty which are to an extent masked by the picturesque image of the area. The four counties in north west Wales qualified for Objective 1 funding up to 2006, and will continue to qualify for Convergence funding from 2007 onwards. The economic base of the region is narrow and there is a legacy of industrial decline and an agricultural sector which has experienced many crises in recent years, such as the BSE crisis and the foot and mouth epidemic. Wage levels are some of the lowest in the UK and many job opportunities are seasonal and low paid. Although the overall levels of unemployment are not as high as in other parts of Wales, there are pockets of unemployment, and also a high level of ‘hidden unemployment’ in some parts. The rurality of the area means that many people have difficulties in accessing learning and employment opportunities. This is particularly true for those who do not have access to private transport as in many parts of the region public transport is poor, or even non-existent. Lack of child-care is also an issue in many parts of the region, with the lack of Welsh-speaking child minders a particular problem.

Migration is a matter of concern, both the out-migration of many young people in search of education and training, and the inward migration of a generally older age-group. Until recently the majority of those migrating to the area came from other parts of the United Kingdom, but in the last eighteen months, there have been significant numbers of migrants coming from Eastern Europe to all parts of the north Wales region.

The area has a unique cultural and linguistic identity, with percentages of bilingual (Welsh/English) speakers varying from under 20% to over 60% in different parts of the region. An increasing number of jobs, particularly in the public sector have the ability to speak Welsh as either an essential or a desirable requirement. This may mean that migrants both from the rest of the United Kingdom and elsewhere have difficulties in gaining employment of the level and kind that they would like.

We took account of the special features of north Wales, particularly rurality, and language, in many of the activities of the project.

2. RESEARCH AND ACTIVITIES - INNOVATION IN LIFELONG LEARNING

a) RESEARCHING THE EXPERIENCE OF LEARNERS IN RURAL AREAS AND THE 'INNOVATE' PROGRAMME

One of the aims of GWLAD is to look at innovative ways of delivering education in rural areas. Part of our work involved researching the experience of students who are already learning in isolated rural areas, having enrolled on distance learning courses. Distance learning is often seen as an ideal means for people living in isolated areas to embark on learning, and the Open University (OU) are the acknowledged experts at delivering higher education (HE) at this level. The aim of this work package was to explore the experiences of students in rural areas studying in a distance format, and to consider ways in which their experiences might be improved upon.

This work package carried out jointly by the School of Lifelong Learning and the Open University had as its focus an exploration of the experiences of students who have taken Open University Openings courses. Questionnaires were sent out early in 2006 to over 100 students.

Nineteen Openings students replied to the questionnaires. Seventeen supplied names and addresses, 15 of them were contacted with the aim of arranging interviews. Ten agreed to be interviewed, all of them women. Findings are based on this small sample, who have been interviewed in some depth (as well as one student on UWB's Writing with Intent distance-learning course). Four tutors were also interviewed.

Students on Openings courses have no contact with each other and contact with the tutor is made only by telephone: these are the two main problem areas which emerged from interviews. It is apparent that these arrangements suit some students very well, particularly those who regard the Openings as a means to an end. One young woman, for example, working as a microbiology technician, took Breakthrough to Maths, Science and Technology as a means to getting back into thinking academically (after a break of eight years since A levels) before starting a degree course. She knew what she wanted and was satisfied with the course and with tutor support and said "it did what it said on the tin."

Inevitably perhaps, people who took Openings to explore starting or returning to learning were not always so satisfied. Ten of the students who completed questionnaires felt that they would have liked to meet other students and/or their tutor. Loneliness and isolation emerged as key issues. “I would have liked to meet other students, I missed the social intercourse” and “I would prefer to see my tutor directly ... and the rest of the class. Would it be possible to assign a tutor accessible to a student in the area where they live?” were typical comments. All except one of the people interviewed felt the same: “I feel strongly that it would have been an advantage to meet other students, it could have been motivational.” The exception liked the anonymity “no one need know if you can’t cope or fail.” Tutors reported that students were quite happy with distance learning and being free of comparison with their peers.

Another theme emerged during interviews: students felt that once the course was finished they were “dropped”. There was no signposting or follow-on support. One student said that she got her final assignment back (after three months) marked with one word, “Pass”. There was no feedback (as there had been throughout the course). She felt that if she had had feedback she would have felt differently. “It would have been a good way to close the relationship” she said. She said that the OU “don’t try to move you on, there’s no support about what you could do next ... there could be a drop-in session for people who have finished to explore possibilities. There’s no development. They need a course adviser to take people to the next stage.” Another typical response was “I missed the calls when they stopped, I would have liked some follow-up.”

These comments indicate some of the problems that emerge for distance learning students when they come to the end of a particular course. Those who study face-to-face are more likely to continue informal links with staff and students, which will help them make a bridge to the next stage of studying. In order to provide this for locally based OU students, and others who were interested in degree-level studies, a new day-long programme was devised. The INNOVATE programme was devised by the School of Lifelong Learning with the aim of dispelling fears and anxieties people might have about Higher Education, in a relaxed, informal, interactive setting:

I information, impartiality and individual attention
N no pressure, no commitment and definitely no hieroglyphics!
N new technology, on-line, on-tap, on-course
O openings, Access and Tasters – then, now and next
V value-added support – pastoral, academic, financial, special needs
A advice, signposting and one-to-one counselling
T terminology terrors – tamed and explained
E excited? we are too ... and it's all there waiting for you!

Sessions were planned in Bangor and Wrexham in March 2007. Despite extensive poster and flier distribution and advertising in newspapers, numbers attending the two workshops were small. Not as many invitations had been distributed through the OU as had been hoped, but nonetheless there were positive outcomes to this work package.

- The Innovate programme is a flexible resource for future use.
- OU tutors who attended the days agreed that it would be beneficial for the two institutions to work co-operatively in the future. For example, they will invite University of Wales, Bangor staff to their recruitment days. It was agreed to work together in the future to provide information for potential students, with mutual recognition of the issue of overkill/dearth of information and the importance of concise, combined, relevant information hubs. Lessons were learned in terms of taking the programme out to the community. This was piloted in Caia Park in Wrexham in Adult Learners' Week.

INNOVATE in Caia Park

The Caia Park Development Partnership welcomed the project's presence during Adult Learners' Week. This meant that the programme could not be delivered in any of the methods that had been planned, i.e., a mix of sharing information, interactive sessions, workshops, and IT support. Handouts on issues covered in the power point were available and several people stopped and asked for advice. A number wanted further information, for example about OU open days, their names and addresses were taken and the information sent on to them.

One of INNOVATE's aims is to work co-operatively with other institutions. Although representatives of the OU could not attend the day, they sent literature and provided answers to queries which had come up on the day. NEWI supported INNOVATE by providing their own stand and literature, with two postgraduate students on hand to answer questions.

June 2007: developing and presenting INNOVATE is still work in progress and plans are currently under way to use the resource in a variety of venues until the GWLAD project ends. It is hoped by then that this will be a valuable tested resource for the School of Lifelong Learning to share with other agencies.

The main lesson we learned from this experience was the need to work in partnership with local communities and to run events aimed at new learners in accessible and familiar locations.

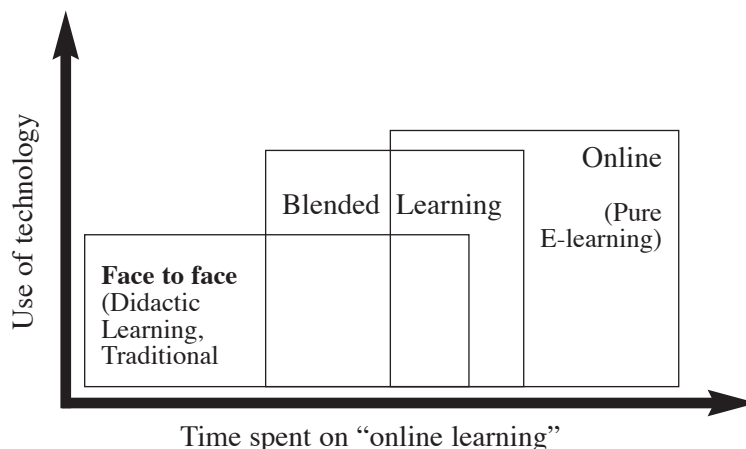
b) BLENDED LEARNING

This activity comes under the GWLAD aim of developing innovative approaches to learning, suitable for use in dispersed rural areas.

Blended learning is the term used for combining more than one teaching method. New technology offers a variety of learning methods which are often offered in conjunction with the traditional face-to-face mode of delivery. Students can join e networks to form links with other students as well as their tutor. Heinze and Procter (2004)¹ define the method thus:

“Blended Learning is learning that is facilitated by the effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning, and founded on transparent communication amongst all parties involved with a course.”

They demonstrate their “conception of blended learning” in the diagram below which demonstrates an example of the overlapping combination of interfaces which are possible within blended learning.



Conception of Blended Learning – adapted from Heinze and Procter (2004)

Indicators to widespread expansion of e-learning alongside more traditional learning methods abound. E-learning is high on the government agenda. "The future of higher education" (White Paper 2003) contains plans to "embed e-learning in a full and sustainable way within the next 10 years." Household internet access stands at 57% in the UK (Office of National Statistics 2006).

The advantages and disadvantages of both e-learning, and traditional face-to-face have been well documented (Heinze and Procter 2004). Face-to-face works well where the lecturer is communicative, flexible and experienced; there are also social advantages for students. E-learning has the advantage of being accessible when convenient for the student and is proficient at conveying factual information. Blended learning, however, can offer the best of both worlds, with students having the choice of being able to meet lecturers and fellow-students or to pursue their studies electronically.

Blended Learning at UWB: the Globalisation module

Globalisation is a core module for two part-time degrees offered by the College of Education and Lifelong Learning. It is also an optional module for students taking other courses. The GWLAD project enabled lecturers to develop on line resources, to prepare very detailed material and to pilot free-choice blended learning with a group of mature students.

The students were used to using Blackboard (a virtual learning environment) as a supplementary learning tool and were familiar with using it as a discussion board. Globalisation is the first module, however, where students have been able to opt for entirely face-to-face, entirely on line or a combination of the two methods.

The tutor identified the fact that GWLAD had provided the resources for a pilot with far more detailed preparation of materials than would otherwise have been possible and with more graphics. It will be delivered in Wrexham next year with changes which need to have made identified in the pilot. It has, according to one of the tutors, "provided an unexpected window of opportunity" to roll the programme out.

He still feels, however, that it is important to have a significant element of face-to-face contact, not only for social aspects in terms of students

meeting each other and the tutors but also for generation of discussion and explanation of theories.

This was borne out by students, especially those who had some previous experience of distance learning.

J had followed distance-learning courses with the OU and had felt “very isolated”. She is now studying for a BA in literature and feels that “it is really important to have other people’s inputs ... when you’re isolated it’s difficult to know if you’re going in the right direction ... you get reassurance from the other students as well as the tutor.” She also spoke of the advantage of meeting tutors face-to-face. She mentioned one who was “really inspiring” and feels that the dynamism the lecturer generated would have been lost on-line.

One of the tutors raised the same point. He mentioned a very professionally developed on-line module which “you would think had been put together by someone wearing a suit in Harvard” whereas in reality the tutor in question is well-known for being very supportive, accessible and approachable. These are qualities which are highly valued, arguably particularly by mature students and those for whom entering higher education is a daunting prospect. Such inputs are not transferable remotely.

Another student spoke of her reticence in communicating with other students on line: she felt it was an “unreal relationship ... you might know of someone who had had difficulties of some kind, but because you don’t know them, you can’t say anything.” She had previously taken an OU course which had involved telephone tutorials. These were preferable, she felt, than simply having on-line contact, which she felt was “too remote, there was no rapport, no tone of voice to relate to.”

Blended learning, as piloted under GWLAD, offers solutions in terms of choice and access. None of the students so far has followed the course completely on-line, but it is hoped that before the end of the project opportunities will arise to interview some who have done so.

¹Heinze, A., and Procter, C., (2004) *Reflections on the use of Blended Learning*, Education in a Changing Environment Conference Proceedings, University of Salford.

c) AN ICT PROGRAMME IN A RURAL AREA

In late 2005 the GWLAD project had come to the attention of Sylfaen Cymunedol, who contacted us to see whether we could offer any help to a group of women they were working with in a village in Gwynedd. The women had already identified a possible niche for themselves (their Unique Selling Points being local, women, and Welsh speaking) in the employment or self-employment market as outdoor pursuits instructors. At the time of our meeting it was uncertain what funding streams would be available to them for training as instructors, but all agreed that ICT skills would be a useful acquisition in any field of future training or work.

Initially a taster session was held to be sure this was what was wanted and to assess the most appropriate level of the course. Following this the women registered on the course 'IT Skills in the Workplace', even though a higher level course was anticipated, so that after 20 hours a qualification would be possible, in the eventuality that participants had to leave the course prior to completion, although none actually did. All the women followed the course for 20 weeks leading to a HE Certificate in Contemporary IT Skills.

The course has been organised differently from a standard outreach course, in that 'extras' were built into the course. i.e.,

- a course with only six participants would not normally run;
- the participants have been given access to the university's intranet and 'blackboard', so that they have the communication options available to full-time students; these are not normally available to students on part-time outreach courses;
- liaison with external agencies signposting participants to other sources of information, guidance or advice, e.g. Careers Wales: all made appointments for either psychometric testing, interview skills, writing cvs; the contact with Careers Wales led one participant to take advantage of their 'Stepping Stones' scheme which pays for childcare if following FE courses;
- providing an inspirational speaker to discuss their chosen route of outdoor pursuits employment (enhanced by the offer of 2 free places on a weekend navigation course in Snowdonia).

Following these activities, the group intended to study for the ECDL and had attended preparatory sessions to work towards it. However, now the

group has received funding for outdoor pursuits training, the amount of time and commitment the women can give to ECDL preparation has reduced, and for the summer months the sessions have been suspended. It is hoped these will recommence in the autumn.

Since following the courses, one of the six has gained part-time employment in the voluntary sector, another decided to follow a full time further education course; the other four are following outdoor pursuits training, one of whom acts as administrator for the group.

3. RESEARCH AND ACTIVITIES - THE EMPOWERMENT OF SOCIALLY EXCLUDED GROUPS

a) THE BLACK ENVIRONMENT NETWORK'S (BEN)'S WORK WITH INFORMAL LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

The work of BEN is primarily linked to the GWLAD aim of empowering socially excluded groups to engage in learning activities. Their particular target group is ethnic communities.

BEN seeks to enable full participation by ethnic communities in the built and natural environment. BEN takes the view that there is no such thing as a pure environmental or heritage project. A so-called pure environmental or heritage project is one that has neglected its social, cultural and economic context. Through its work, BEN has found that the most effective way of achieving results is by creating tailored informal learning partnerships. This allows for the unique characteristics and needs of different ethnic communities to be taken into account. It also allows for the potential offered by different provider organisations to be fully realised. A partnership approach bringing together members of ethnic communities and organisations from the environmental and heritage sectors draws out common ground that fuels the learning.

BEN GWLAD Project in North Wales

Objective: to improve and develop skills through exploring issues of access to training/education opportunities, in relation to ethnic minorities, in rural areas experiencing multiple levels of deprivation.

We will do this in the context of what the natural environment, outdoor activity and historic environment sectors have to offer, and address access by engaging with both the provider organisations and their ethnic minority constituents.

Linking:

- Ethnic communities
- Opportunities for informal learning through the positive activities set within the natural environment, outdoor activity and historic environment sectors
- Informal learning in the adult learning sector
- Further formal learning education

BEN has been working for many years in urban areas, dealing with concentrations of ethnic minorities in inner city settings. What sets the BEN GWLAD Project apart is that it has taken place in a semi-rural setting. It is pioneering work aiming to involve a very sparse population, with families and individuals spread across a very extensive geographical area.

The BEN methodology involves four stages:

1. Identifying participants' agendas and needs
2. Creating opportunities for people to meet (and creating opportunities for people to discover) and identify common agendas
3. Developing capacity to engage with each other
4. Following up

Over the period of the project, BEN has supported the development of the following informal learning partnerships using this methodology:

Initiative 1. Supporting the North Wales Chinese Women's Society to address the health needs of over-fifties through linking them to what health services, environmental and heritage organisations, and the Council have to offer.

Initiative 2. Supporting the Countryside Council for Wales' Race Equality Focus Group to formulate their Race Equality Action Plan.

Initiative 3. Connecting ethnic community groups and a full range of environmental and heritage organisations to each other in the context of access to activities and information, through networking and sharing events.

From these initiatives BEN has produced two publications, launched in June 2007.

The first is aimed at personnel within the environment and heritage sectors:

Informal Learning partnerships for engaging with ethnic communities: Guidance for the Environmental and Heritage sectors

The second is aimed at ethnic communities, and highlights opportunities for training, volunteering and employment:

Love the Countryside Work for the Countryside: Job opportunities to consider in the Environmental and Heritage sectors

The benefits of the project will derive from these publications which will be disseminated among the ethnic communities and those working in the environmental and heritage sectors. Other benefits arise from the learning partnerships that have been formed and the informal learning events that have taken place.

b) SKILLS TRAINING WORKSHOPS FOR ECONOMIC MIGRANTS

This activity fits into the GWLAD aim of empowering those from socially excluded groups. It also links to the GWLAD aim of developing innovative approaches to learning.

Research undertaken by the Economic Migrants Initiative revealed the widespread need for skills training and vocational support for ethnic minorities living in rural north Wales. The need for an integrated approach to enhance work-life balance was demonstrated. The workshops funded by GWLAD are designed to provide training for migrant workers.

It is delivered by a UWB staff member who is herself a migrant from Europe. She describes the training as having:

“the purpose to teach work or life related subjects in the medium of English as basic English training. The training has not been developed in this way before and the group has to design, develop and pilot the training material. As the training and the layout is an innovative approach, it would need to be continuously revised to develop an approved and recognised training module.”

The following is taken from the convenor’s report:

Seminar Outline:

Our Seminars are single session one-day meetings, which are devoted to a particular topic. Our learning objective is to provide an open discussion forum to explore the topic under experienced and professional supervision. Our methods are interactive and we are aiming to provide an open and friendly learning environment.

Overall Aim:

Our Basic English seminars are aiming to support people from ethnic minority backgrounds to develop their English skills and acquire work related knowledge at the same time. The seminars are newly designed and have an innovative approach to learning and diversity issues.

Specialised aim:

The aim of the seminar is to support employers and employees to increase their basic knowledge about Health and Safety requirements in general and improve knowledge for the required sector.

Seminar Outline Objectives:

- *To define and narrow down the subject*
- *To provide a forum of open discussion to support group developments*
- *To support strategies to overcome lack of inside knowledge*
- *To develop a people-orientated outline*
- *To work within an interactive framework*

Method: *Interactive, participative*

Interim Résumé:

The project suffered from a fluctuation of co-workers. The programme was to start in December with the first trial. After two seminars (Wrexham and Bangor), the schedule was changed as the client group is mainly in work and preferred evening sessions.

It is noteworthy that 75% of the participants claim not to have received Health and Safety inductions or relevant legal training, e.g. food and hygiene.

The participants are asking for training to develop their skills, therefore changes in the priorities are made as well.

However, it was noted on several occasions, that the clients were happy to follow a course in English which was aimed at their language abilities and supported interactive learning experience.

Clients noted that the first time they were seen as fully enabled bodies and the training increased their confidence in English communication. It was remarked on from several participants, that the biggest handicap was not to have the possibility to integrate via normal classes and they feel isolated in their communities.

It was also noted on several occasion that the information given was relevant for their life situation. The team managed to signpost several clients to other organisations or supported with job search and tailored business advice outside the seminars.

Other activities resulting from the GWLAD co-operation:

North east Wales:

Currently, we are working with the Communities First (Caia Park, Wrexham) in identifying the support needed (either work or business related) by the Polish community in Wrexham.

North west Wales:

The key workers in north west Wales are delivering various seminars for migrant workers. The seminars are intending to support English communication skills and improving the generic vocational skills for economic migrant workers. The Bangor area has also a pilot project running, which is supporting women from ethnic background to increase their chances on the labour market, by improving vocational English, IT, office skills, and citizens' rights.

c) CONFIDENCE RAISING COURSE FOR SMUG
(SUBSTANCE MISUSE USERS GROUP)

This activity relates to the GWLAD aim of empowering those from socially excluded groups. The fact that initial contact with this substance misusers' group came via Medrwn Môn demonstrates the value of partnership working.

The GWLAD researcher and Medrwn Môn's volunteer co-ordinator met a volunteer from the Substance Misuse Users' Group (SMUG) in June 2006. The group has funding from Ynys Môn's Community Safety Unit and evolved from a unit called Drug Informed Choice Education. The volunteer (by now the group's co-ordinator) arranged a meeting with a group of users and former users. They identified a range of training courses which would help them run their organisation more efficiently (for example, health and safety, data protection, office skills, first aid), but the co-ordinator stressed that the over-riding issue with this group was low self-esteem and that a confidence-building course was a priority. He felt that participants would be empowered to maximise learning experiences on the other courses if the issue of low self-esteem was addressed.

Ten workshops were held, convened by a UWB member of staff who has considerable experience of working with vulnerable groups. Attendance was often problematic for some beneficiaries, with court appearances, being moved to accommodation away from the area or attending de-tox, for example, preventing attendance. The co-ordinator was no longer able

to continue his voluntary work and until a new (and very motivated) co-ordinator was found, the group became fragmented. However, despite these vicissitudes, the new co-ordinator said at the time:

“should the course be assessed on psychological impact (i.e. an increase in motivation, confidence and self-esteem), then each and every lesson must be regarded as a huge success. The impact B. (the course convenor) has had on all attending, including myself, is amazing ... His delivery and influence certainly motivated the homeless/addicted towards considering other aspects of their lives. SMAT (Substance Misuse Action Team, based in the local authority) are showing an interest and a senior probation officer has asked someone to look at the project.”

GWLAD's commitment to innovation and empowerment meant that the project could be re-started in April 2007. The co-ordinator has worked extremely hard, liaising with the Probation Service, the Lighthouse (run by Di-Gartref Ynys Môn) and MIND. He has built upon these contacts to develop their involvement in order to engender a sense of commitment which he hopes will make the project sustainable.

There are nine beneficiaries signed up to the new sessions with all attending regularly. The co-ordinator feels that this is due to careful preparatory work he has undertaken with each one. He told each beneficiary that he would be able to help them catch up if they missed a session, stressing the importance of completing each session as it leads on to the next. Each beneficiary has a ring binder with worksheets to follow each week. Some have chosen to fill in the worksheets with the aim of getting accreditation (OCN level 1) while others prefer to participate verbally rather than in writing. The emphasis is upon creating an atmosphere of mutual support where beneficiaries feel safe and able to get the most out of the sessions.

The co-ordinator is enthusiastic:

“It's a very good course. It gives the group some structure in their week. It's produced in a safe and healthy environment, which is alien to most of them. I hope it will motivate them towards change by challenging feelings of worthlessness. Without self-esteem there's no productivity. The only barrier to this course is their chaotic lifestyles ... there's no lack of enthusiasm.”

The co-ordinator and the new chair of the group are currently being trained by the convenor, who says that they both have a natural aptitude for work of this nature. The aim is that they will be qualified to run these accredited courses themselves in the future. There are several SMUG groups across north Wales and the co-ordinator and chair plan to roll out such courses across the area. They hope that others will be able to take on training and that this “snowballing” will mean that the course is accessible to an expanding number of users and ex-users. The plan at the beginning of the project was to produce a toolkit for other groups: as stated above, it is unlikely that this will happen under GWLAD. The fact that this pilot has been very successful in terms of benefit to beneficiaries is a very creditable outcome, and the fact that two beneficiaries have learned skills which will ensure the project’s sustainability once the GWLAD project ends bears testimony to GWLAD’s ethos of working reflexively and innovatively.

d) LEARNING WELSH IN A COMMUNITY LOCATION

This activity relates both to the GWLAD aim of learning into employment and the empowerment of socially excluded groups. In rural north Wales, many of the available jobs require Welsh language skills.

The GWLAD researcher accessed the group through a Barnardo’s development worker who runs a parent-and-toddler group in the community centre of a small village in north west Anglesey. She felt that a significant number of the parents were isolated geographically, socially, culturally and linguistically: “A lot of people move to this part of the world not knowing anything about Wales. They’re surprised when they hear so many people speaking Welsh and some of them come here not knowing that their children will learn Welsh in school.” The researcher attended some of the group’s sessions, mainly made up of incomers, to identify what the group felt were the barriers which stood in the way of getting employment or training.

The parents agreed that lack of affordable local childcare was, as always, a significant issue. But they also immediately identified the language issue and several expressed the wish to learn Welsh. Two had started Welsh courses in the past, but locations and times had not fitted in with parental responsibilities and, in one case, the class was discontinued as the number of participants fell. The parents clearly stipulated their

requirements: they wanted the lessons in the community centre and they wanted to bring their children with them.

The director of Welsh for Adults at UWB agreed to pilot a ten week taster session where children could be present in the same hall as their parents.

The classes started in April 2007 with 13 participants. The group has expanded and now includes several local women in their 50s who had heard about the course by word of mouth or seen posters left in the local health centre, post office and church. There are usually two or three toddlers present. (No official childcare is available however: WEFO rules stipulate that childminders must be registered if they are to be paid and none are available in this rural village location. The GWLAD researcher is usually there to distract the children while their parents learn.)

This is a successful initiative with a very enthusiastic group. A key factor is that they identified the need for Welsh classes themselves. The fact that a collective sense of ownership contributes significantly to the viability of a project has been well documented. Several of the learners have moved to the area in recent months while others have lived here longer and know something of the language. At least four want to learn the language to improve their job prospects (one used to work for Job Centre in Somerset, one works at local health centre and one for social services in Llangefni). Two of the group are train managers and are not able to attend every session. One is using the lessons as part of a self-designed occupational therapy project, in the belief that learning Welsh will expand his job prospects and enhance the voluntary work he undertakes. The tutor is very open to adaptation and accommodation. She blends the learning of those who attend every session with those who have missed some lessons. The atmosphere is informal, interactive and relaxed.

J is the mother of two primary school age children and a toddler (who attends the Welsh class with her parents). J's husband, in his early 40s, is local but "never bothered with learning Welsh when I was at school." He lived in England until he and his English wife moved back to the area in 2006. J. feels it is important to learn Welsh so that she can go back to work and so that she can help her sons who are learning Welsh at school. "They ask me questions and I have to say I can't answer them. I want to show them that it is worth making the effort to learn and if they see that

we're learning they will realise that it's important." She was one of the people who identified the need for provision to learn Welsh locally to the GWLAD researcher and she has not missed a session.

One beneficiary, a woman in her 50s who moved to the area six months ago, said she had tried to enrol on a course in Aberffraw but that she had been unable to do so as the course was cancelled because no one else had enrolled. This is a common problem in a rural dispersed area. Providers require minimum numbers for courses to be viable, and this can be difficult to achieve in small centres of population. She had tried in vain to find other courses and was delighted to find this course "on the doorstep". She had joined the local WI and heard about the course from a fellow member. It is clear that the informal and friendly atmosphere generated by the teacher has encouraged people to join.

The project's success is endorsed by the fact that Cymraeg i Oedolion (CiO) unit at the University of Wales Bangor will run Wlpan, a full beginners' course in the village, starting in September. The course will be held in the local church, which has a comfortable converted loft, with a cr_che in the neighbouring community centre. This is a new departure for CiO, and is a direct result of the GWLAD initiative.

The group would like to be able to practise their newly-acquired skills over the summer. It has been suggested that they agree to meet each other as a group and the instructor has arranged to meet the group three times over July and August to keep up the learning impetus going. At least eight of them intend to start the Wlpan course in September.

Praise for the instructor was high at a focus group held on the last day of the course:

"S. makes it fun ... it is serious, but we also have fun."

"it's a confidence-builder all round, I'm beginning to use Welsh, just in little conversations, in places like the Post Office and this morning I spoke in Welsh at the bank. People really appreciate it that you're trying to learn."

"I liked it when it was interactive, it was like doing a play, it broke the ice and made you less self-conscious."

"It's been very child-friendly, I've enjoyed bringing my daughter ... and my wife's been able to come when she isn't working. I'll

definitely carry on and it's great that they're going to have a crèche then as well."

"It was brilliant, a really relaxed, informal atmosphere and it was great being able to bring my 15 month old daughter with me, I wouldn't have been able to come otherwise. My husband has been a few times, but has had to miss a few because of work commitments. But S. has always made it OK for people who dip in and out and somehow managed to let him keep up while she carried on with new things for the rest of us. So although it was a laugh and very friendly, she really taught us properly and I learned a lot."

Several members of the group had tried learning Welsh before. One said she had been put off by an instructor who only seemed interested in getting people to pass exams. A few have expressed concerns that Wlpan will be too formal and exam-led, but the tutor has reassured them that this will not be the case. All the beneficiaries are pleased that their tutor will go on to deliver Wlpan.

It is clear that the group felt a strong sense of ownership of the project and this was reflected in their commitment to learning. The course was provided at their request in a location of their choice and the strong attendance record throughout the course bears out the significance of this. This taster course evidently served to dispel any fears about "failing" to learn the language.

e) THE LEARNING COMMUNITIES NETWORK

Each aspect of this initiative reflect all three of GWLAD's aims: it addresses the issue of empowerment of socially excluded (in this case, isolated,) groups, using innovative approaches to facilitate increased employment opportunities and greater engagement with social economy activities.

The focus of this project is on informal, community-led learning, using participative and integrated community development processes within a rural context. All three strands of the project are based at the Capel Curig Community Centre, a newly-developed integrated rural resource hub that serves the wider rural area of Conwy's highlands.

The area's economic bases are agriculture, tourism and adventure sports and environmental industries. Interaction between the three sectors is

limited despite there being great possibilities for creating new opportunities if there were greater communication and integration. Young people move away from the area to find housing, education, training and quality employment, while lack of developmental support means that farm families and older age-groups become increasingly isolated.

This project focuses on old ideas and new technologies to address the problem of limited access to local opportunities, particularly for young people, women and older men. It uses community expertise to build and share skills and knowledge, gain confidence and build enterprising mindsets.

The aim is to develop an integrated learning community, using blended and participatory methods, led by the community. As confidence among participants is raised and social capital built, it is envisaged that each strand will be rendered sustainable and mutually supportive, drawing upon new-found and traditional skills and expertise to retain and maintain local identity and integrity.

- The Digital Film and Editing Group is growing in terms of beneficiaries and number of sessions held. There are now three groups of six young people involved in this rolling programme in which filming and editing skills are developed, ranging from, for example, an environmental before-and-after project in the Gwydr forest to developing video clips as e-postcards, recording sports activities and digital storytelling. Two guest speakers will be joining the group during September to talk about digital opportunities to explore the possibilities in terms of creating new, quality and global employment for themselves in rural Wales with the latest technology.

- Clwb Cymry'r Ucheldir is aimed at rural men mainly but includes their family members where they wish to join activities. Men's rural networks, especially agricultural ones, have been decimated by a range of crises over the last ten years (demographic, industrial, cultural). Confidence is at an all time low and accessing the right sort of support to develop opportunities and confidence is not easy in an isolated setting. Men are identified as being a hard-to-reach group in relation to learning activities but also in terms of them accessing support services. As such this group is a great success with between 15 and 30 attending sessions (varies according to the agricultural and tourism calendar)

This club is about beginning with the men's own realities, and those of their families, forming the basis for the construction of a new network with content developed by the participants themselves.

Events thus far have included informal sessions on culture and language, the role of the A5 road in developing the area across time and looking at the history of shepherding and family farming in mid Wales. In May a study visit to Ffair Caron took place, where participants identified and evaluated the importance of local lives and activities regarding the maintenance of culture, re-localisation and quality tourism development.

Late summer and autumn sessions are planned on creating a digital archive for the locality, developing culturally relevant events and activities, linking to other networks as well as more speaker events, where the content is relevant to the men's development ideas.

Interestingly, poetry (englynion in particular) and literature become a part of each and every session, whatever the topic. The group are planning to hold two poetry events in the coming year – a 'STOMP' and, if possible, YMRYSOŶ Y BEIRDD. In light of the broad interest in writing and poetry, the group are considering the possibility of holding a writing and poetry workshop in the future.

- The Women's Business Club is due to start in September. Thus far there is great interest – young women wanting to start independent businesses early on in their working lives and older women looking to diversify and create better income possibilities for themselves whilst maintaining their family and community roles. It is envisaged that there will be a minimum of ten women attending, though interest shown suggests a figure nearer to 20.

The outcomes are soft outcomes in the first instance – a community enjoying itself and its treasures and greater GDH (gross domestic happiness). As the activities develop further evaluation will identify firmer outcomes but for now anecdotal evidence suggests that thus far the process is working.

Some ideas about widening participation even further are developing (having 'circulating' sessions instead of all sessions in one location; simplifying the paperwork; better recording of the sessions and more regular reflective sessions – though doing the last informally is more acceptable at this early stage and does not put people off attending).

4. RESEARCH AND ACTIVITIES - LEARNING INTO EMPLOYMENT

a) RESEARCHING THE EXPERIENCE OF VOLUNTEERS – MEDRWN MÔN

The Medrwn Môn work package has focused on our third aim of “learning into employment”. As the umbrella group for voluntary organisations in the rural area of Anglesey, the partnership is able to draw upon their expertise in working with the voluntary sector and to access their wide range of contacts.

The work falls into three broad categories:

- Looking at how people experience volunteering (and building upon those skills)
- Researching the issue of employers taking on unemployed people for work experience on a voluntary basis
- Working with employers to release employees to undertake voluntary work

The belief underlying all these issues is the value of volunteering for both those out of work and those in work. Volunteering can allow the former group to develop skills and experiences that can lead into employment, and for the latter group can develop links between business and the local community as well as bringing skills developed through volunteering into the workplace.

Researching the volunteering experience

Medrwn Môn’s Volunteer Forum provided a contact who introduced the GWLAD researcher to a group of volunteers who were keen to participate in research into volunteering. Six individual interviews were conducted and a focus group attended by 20 volunteers provided a wealth of information. A range of topics was covered:

1. reasons why they did voluntary work.
2. skills learned
3. volunteering activities
4. resulting developments
5. expectations
6. rewards
7. personal development

It was clear that the volunteers got as much out of volunteering as they put in, a fact which they were quick to acknowledge. Motivations for volunteering ranged from meeting new people (mentioned 13 times), to learning new skills and broadening experience (12 times), increasing self-confidence (“thinking more of myself”) (10 times) and to help other people (“to put something back into the community”) (12 times).

This group of volunteers had ambitious plans to build upon the skills they had developed by doing voluntary work. They were already running two fruit and vegetable co-ops in their town and wanted to expand their enterprises by growing local food for local people and exploring the possibility of cooking classes and a community café. A planned trip to Cumbria to visit the Rural Regeneration Unit’s flagship co-ops had to be cancelled when the RRU unexpectedly levied a last-minute charge for which there was no budget. The volunteer who was the driving force behind the vegetable-growing scheme got paid employment (thanks, he says, to the skills he developed doing voluntary work) and the focus has shifted on to cooking and opening a community café. To this end a visit was arranged to visit another food co-op/community café in Mold and a community café in Wrexham. (see Informal Learning for Volunteers below).

These volunteers also wanted to conduct a community audit, being dissatisfied with one recently conducted which they saw as a “top down” exercise which took no account of local opinion. Several workshops and discussions took place on a diverse range of methods of gathering qualitative data but the survey was not conducted due to local political sensitivities and issues surrounding changes of personnel in a community agency.

The benefits of volunteering are widely acknowledged. The CAB, for example, has a scheme whereby they encourage clients to become volunteers; achievements are measured in terms of distance travelled. One young mother who undertook this training says that she has “benefited hugely ... the CAB really pulled me out of myself ... it’s about developing confidence and all sorts of skills which look good on your CV.” She now has a “fantastic job” which she loves and says “there’s no looking back” for her now. She feels that “employers are now looking for people with competencies rather than qualifications.”

The research we carried out into volunteering on Ynys Môn demonstrated both the huge gains people get from their volunteering experiences and also some of the difficulties faced by people trying to work together in their communities.

Businesses hosting placements for unemployed people

Medrwn Môn considered that one potential way for unemployed people to gain valuable work experience would be through volunteering in the private sector and no literature on volunteering in the private sector was found (although there is plenty of data on the reverse issue, i.e., employers releasing employees to do voluntary work), it was decided to carry out research on this topic as part of the GWLAD project.

Questionnaires were sent to 100 businesses on Anglesey, asking employers whether they would be willing to host a volunteer in their workplace. The few big businesses on the island were canvassed. Some were nationals (banks, building societies, supermarkets etc.) but mainly recipients were SMEs and micro-businesses, the dominant sectors of the island's economy. The aim was to use the questionnaires to identify businesses with which interviews could be conducted in order to find out what work they could offer, what sort of employees they sought, what, if any, were the barriers, needs and expectations they faced and what training they would be able to offer. The questionnaires were sent out in early November 2005: by mid-December six had been returned. Half the businesses were telephoned and 25 questionnaires were re-sent by e mail.

With hindsight, it might have been better to call the project "work experience". Arguably, employers might have been more willing to take on people seeking work experience rather than "volunteers". The latter has altruistic connotations which perhaps do not sit comfortably in the world of business: possibly the concept of an unemployed person seeking work experience would have been seen as less of a threat and more of a challenge, with the power base resting firmly in the hands of the employer in his/her role as didact.

It also became clear that SMEs do not, on the whole, have the resources to take on volunteers. A graphic designer, operating as a one-man band from his own home, for example, pointed out that he had no space, no time and, therefore, nothing to offer to a volunteer. (Time was mentioned

as a factor by 90% of the people who were telephoned). Our main conclusion from this is that, at the present time, the private sector in Anglesey does not see the advantage of taking on volunteers. This does not necessarily mean that there are no such advantages, but additional work needs to be done with the sector to clarify possibilities.

Businesses releasing employees to do voluntary work (work in progress, June 2007) – Medrwn Môn are researching the feasibility of initiating the scheme with businesses across the island. The aim is to start the project “at home”, with the agency’s staff being released for volunteering. Participants will be interviewed to ascertain the benefits and the aim is to develop a best practice toolkit for employers. It is hoped that once employers see the benefits of taking part in the project, they will recognise the potential of hosting volunteers who wish to gain experience in the workplace.

Gerddi Twt donated plans for a community wildlife garden at Llaingoch School to Business in the Community (BitC). BitC had intended to recruit employees from local businesses to undertake the work. In the event, BitC withdrew and Medrwn Môn undertook to find employers who would be willing to release employees to take on the project. Homebase in Holyhead have agreed to supply materials and negotiations are under way with one of the biggest employers on the island.

Medrwn Môn plan to develop a toolkit for employers, based on the experience of participating organisations, with the aim of disseminating the benefits of involvement in local voluntary work both to their own workforce and the local community.

b) INFORMAL LEARNING FOR VOLUNTEERS

The Holyhead volunteers run two fruit and vegetable co-ops in the town: one on Wednesdays and one on Fridays. They are a highly-motivated and well-organised group with a core of about 12 regular members. They undertake all kinds of voluntary work: for example, between January and May 2007 they raised £1300 by running Sunday quiz nights at the community centre for LL65, an event which gives local young musicians opportunities which they would not otherwise have. They organise walks in conjunction with Calon Lân and, as one volunteer said, “we help out wherever we’re needed ... we always have done, as our mothers did before us.”

The group have made a substantial contribution to GWLAD's research. Focus groups, interviews and meetings were held in the autumn of 2005 where the volunteers endorsed the benefits of volunteering and shared their thoughts on a range of related issues.

This trip was a substitute for an abortive attempt to visit the Rural Regeneration Unit's (RRU) flagship co-operative enterprise in Cumbria in 2006. (Last minute charges levied by the RRU could not be met). The volunteers wanted to visit another food co-op to see whether they could get new ideas which they could transfer to their own. They were also very willing to share their own expertise with other volunteers. Some of them were interested in developing a community café, a distinct possibility now that their community centre kitchen had been refurbished. A trip to Bryn Gwalia in Mold was arranged in conjunction with the RRU, followed by a visit to the Community Café in Caia Park, Wrexham.

Eighteen people went on the trip (14 from Holyhead and four from the Llangefni co-op). They exchanged information with their host volunteers in Bryn Gwalia, discussed solutions to common problems encountered and compared recording systems. The volunteers were also able to explore the benefits (and pitfalls) of running a community café with host volunteers who had been involved in such a venture. An unexpected outcome, however, is the group's wish to explore the possibilities of starting their own Credit Union.

The Bryn Gwalia Credit Union (CU) operates on the same days as the co-op. The Holyhead volunteers had considered opening their own CU for some time, but had not, hitherto, developed the idea. A group of four beneficiaries spent the entire visit discussing the minutiae of running a CU with a man who is closely involved with the Bryn Gwalia CU. These volunteers are "definitely" planning to open their own. They gathered a wealth of information and three of them are to undergo the training as advised by their new-found mentor.

As one key volunteer pointed out, "We found out such a lot from C., for example I had never worked out how a CU could lend someone three times as much as they had saved after 12 weeks, but he explained how it all works and who to contact to get the information we need ... also it would be ideal having it here at the same time as the co-op as people could pick up their stuff and use the CU at the same time. Quite a few

co-op members already save with the Christmas Club (which operates at the same time as the co-ops) every week, so the CU is just a logical development from that ... C. said that they had tried running one from the council offices in Mold, but that didn't work as some customers had rent arrears and didn't want to go into the office ... but here it should be a win-win situation, with more people encouraged to join the co-op as they come in to use the Credit Union." Another volunteer felt that starting a small-scale community café would be even more viable if more people visit the centre. The Holyhead volunteers have made strong links with the Bryn Gwalia volunteers and have invited them to a return visit. The CU organiser has undertaken to provide any advice and guidance that might be needed.

Further networking opportunities emerged at Caia Park. Volunteers were provided with lunch in the community café and had the opportunity to talk to residents about their venture. Practical tips (like keeping the menu simple, making fresh soup every day, advice about VAT) were passed on and the volunteers are now considering starting a small-scale bi-weekly venture in their own community centre. Some of them preferred the idea of opening a community café in the town. They intend to consult with a community development worker in Caia Park who said he would be happy to pass on advice and guidance. They acknowledge that more research needs to be done before the idea can be developed further.

A week after the trip, the core group of volunteers agreed that much had been gained from the trip. There is definite enthusiasm for and commitment to the idea of opening their own CU as well as an interest in looking into ways of starting a community café.

c) DEVELOPING MOTIVATIONAL, COMPUTERISED INTERVENTIONS TO EMPLOYED AND UNEMPLOYED SUBSTANCE ABUSERS – CAIS

The work of CAIS in the GWLAD partnership comes under our aim of using learning as a way into employment. The particular approach to learning used by CAIS is that of using a motivational intervention which allows people to control their substance misuse behaviour so that they can take up employment or remain in employment.

CAIS is a leading voluntary sector provider of drug and alcohol services in Wales. It was established in 1976 as the Clwyd and Gwynedd Council

on Alcoholism and its main aim is to provide a range of services for people who misuse drugs or alcohol, and to work with communities and other agencies to prevent alcohol and drug related harm.

The agency's mission statement states that its aim is: to reduce the harm caused by the misuse of alcohol and drugs by providing a range of effective services and interventions and by working with others to prevent alcohol and drug related harm so that individuals and communities can maximise their social, health and economic potential.

Over the past 25 years **CAIS** has developed a comprehensive range of client focused services in various locations across the region, and in all its activity **CAIS** is committed to working in partnership with others in keeping with the All Wales Strategy – Tackling Substance Misuse in Wales – A Partnership Approach. (CAIS website) CAIS sits on the Substance Misuse Advice Team (SMAT) in each county.

CAIS's GWLAD work package has focused on developing motivational computerised interventions to employed and unemployed substance abusers. The following is (an abridged) section of CAIS's report to the partnership:

This pilot project aimed to recruit two extremely difficult to engage samples: unemployed, chaotic substance abusers and less chaotic substance abusers employed in heavy industry. The project was considerably more successful in recruiting chaotic substance abusers than it was recruiting employed individuals. ... The employed participants who did volunteer for the project did not meet the necessary inclusion criteria ... The extremely low score of negative consequences reported by the participants, confirmed that this sample were non-abusers of alcohol or drugs. This sample of participants, nevertheless, served as a useful comparison sample to the unemployed sample.

The unemployed sample differed in several ways to the employed sample. Unlike the employed sample, these individuals were typically from single or failed relationships ... and lived alone. The number of problems that they reported from their drug use placed them in the average range for those entering treatment. A measure of their quality of life (i.e., their personal wellbeing score) placed them significantly lower ... than Australian-based norms and the employed sample.

The unemployed sample comprised chaotic substance users ... The project investigated the level of changes across time. Given the chaotic substance use of the unemployed sample there was a very low attrition rate – just 17% in the unemployed sample. A similar proportion of drug and alcohol users were lost at the follow-up. Compared to the average use in the three months prior to the project, the alcohol users reduced their consumption by 48% at the four-month follow-up and the illicit drug users by 62%. Overall, there was a reduction of 29% in the number of days consuming substances at the follow-up. These reductions were also mirrored by improvements in the number of negative consequences experienced and in quality of life. Interestingly, it was drug users who had a tendency to report fewer negative consequences and greater improvements in quality of life. This might be explained by the continued level of excessive consumption (i.e., 66 units per week) of the alcohol users, despite their significant reductions.

Many service providers experience difficulties engaging individuals in substance misuse intervention. It is inherently difficult to motivate substance users to change. This project aimed to gain an impression of the service users opinions of the interventions and whether they felt motivated to change by taking part. Both of the interventions were rated as being highly recommended to others (e.g., more than 80% of participants rated the interventions at the maximum score); the majority of participants also reported being totally motivated by taking part – 69% for the Enhanced Brief Intervention (EBI) and 68% for the Lifestyle Review. As expected, at the four-month follow-up self-reports of the level that the interventions were motivating reduced, nevertheless a substantial proportion of individuals (i.e., 46%) gave a maximum score. The impression is that these interventions were well received by participants – reinforced by the low attrition rates – and that they were useful in motivating them to change their substance use.

CAIS is looking to use the toolkit in its current form with substance misusers in various settings, and also to develop further complementary approaches as part of the EU Convergence funding initiative. Initial plans indicate the need to investigate the development of a general health screening tool, a barriers to employment tool and a barriers to education tool, to form a comprehensive range of products using this psychology based approach. CAIS plans a six year approach to the research, development, implementation, trial and roll-out of these toolkits.

Being part of the GWLAD Development Partnership has enabled CAIS to develop and test this innovative pilot in rural north Wales to the benefit of its client group and potentially a much wider client base. Negotiations are under way with one of the transnational partners to extend the scope of the project within the European Union.

CAIS wishes to acknowledge the support, advice and co-operation received from its partners, led by the School of Lifelong Learning, University of Wales Bangor, during the project, both from north Wales and, from its transnational partners, particularly from the Czech Republic.

5. OTHER ACTIVITIES

This sections outlines in brief some of the other ongoing activities in the GWLAD project that will be described in full in the final report.

- Courses for incomers to Welsh speaking areas
- The use of 'podcasts'
- Research into bridging the gap between vocational and higher education

a) COURSES FOR INCOMERS TO WELSH SPEAKING AREAS

Bwrdd yr Iaith Gymraeg's work with GWLAD links in to the aim of providing learning to help people into employment. Fluent written and spoken Welsh is a requirement for public sector jobs and, increasingly, for those in the private sector. Many incomers arrive to settle in Wales unaware of these facts and the project is aimed to address this issue.

Bwrdd yr Iaith Gymraeg has developed two projects under the auspices of GWLAD. The first evaluates incomers' experiences of Cymhathu (the programme designed to facilitate integration into their new bilingual communities) on the Llŷn peninsula. Three focus groups were held to assess which elements of the scheme have been the most successful and to consider what can be taken as good practice for the local community. The first focus group was made up of local indigenous Welsh people who were working proactively to integrate new incomers or being paid to work as Welsh for Adults tutors. The second focus group was made up of people who had moved to the area during the life of the Cymhathu scheme and the third focus group comprised members of the community who had learned Welsh fluently.

We gleaned rich material from these focus groups about the best ways to welcome new migrants as well as useful guidelines for them about integrating into their new communities. The third focus group offered valuable recommendations to learners about the best methods of learning Welsh formally and informally.

Following this research, best practice guidelines will be put together for:

- First language Welsh speakers on the most helpful ways of welcoming learners and to support learners

- New incomers in order for them to be able to integrate fully into their local communities
- Learners on the best ways for them to learn Welsh informally in their own communities

The second project is also concerned with familiarising incomers. This scheme holds workshops for new incomers with exercise sessions in the following fields:

- An introduction to their new area
- The history of Wales and local history
- Welsh today
- The culture of Wales
- A language taster session

The aim of these workshops is to provide incomers with a good base from which they can learn about their new area and to consider seriously the advantages of learning Welsh so that they can become full members of their new community.

b) THE USE OF 'PODCASTS'

School of Lifelong Learning's students are typically mature adults who live mainly in rural areas of Gwynedd and Anglesey. They study part-time in evening classes in Bangor and independently at home. For several years, undergraduates on the School's degree in Literature and Creative Writing had been offered video screenings of the lectures that take place in the daytime for mainstream students on the English degree. This has been very useful in giving them contact with international experts on a range of literary subjects, all of which are core modules on the degree.

There were limitations to the success of this approach. Because the students did not live close to each other, it was difficult for them to share the resources and take them home. The quality of the recordings was in many cases quite poor, and students with hearing or visual impairments felt disadvantaged. Feedback forms from the students often contained complaints about these videos and every year the subject had been raised in discussions about quality development.

The GWLAD project has enabled the re-recording of all the lectures and their posting as podcasts on Blackboard, the university's virtual learning

environment. Any visual materials used in the lecture were photographed and added to the site. The lectures are also available as CDs should any students have difficulty in gaining online access. We are now able to provide a flexible learning experience for our students in which the quality of the resources is vastly improved. The sound is clearer, and students can listen at home at their own pace so that their individual learning is well supported. Because these new and useful recordings are on the site, students will also make more use of the e-learning support provided by tutors, and this may in time allow us to develop more blended learning approaches.

Although they live in rural or relatively rural areas, students will now be able to benefit from this innovative form of delivery. Just as mainstream full-time students will meet and congregate when they go to lectures, so these new virtual lectures are beginning to encourage students to congregate in a virtual environment that can overcome the isolation of studying alone in remote areas.

c) RESEARCH INTO BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN VOCATIONAL AND HIGHER EDUCATION

The aim of this report is to explore the barriers which stand in the way of work-based learners who have gained vocational qualifications and who wish to use them to make the transition to Higher Education. The research informs GWLAD'S commitment to explore innovation in lifelong learning.

Introduction

Work-based learners are a significant and expanding group of potential higher education learners. Work-based progression routes provide doorways to widening Higher Education (HE) participation to non-traditional HE learners. It also provides ways of engaging employers in higher education, enabling HE to tap into the potentially huge market for workforce development.

The issue of widening progression routes to HE is high on the political agenda. Over the last few years the Department of Lifelong Learning and Skills has invested £1.75 million in post-16 education and training in Wales and have supported 57,000 working age adults in work-based learning (WBL). (Learning and Skills Assessment 2006).

The fact that a vocational route into HE appears to present more barriers than the traditional A level or Access route has been well documented. Vocational and work-based routes to HE have not been given equal weight. Far fewer NVQ 3 qualifiers progress into HE than those with equivalent “traditional” qualifications. Many young people opt for such formal academic qualifications, a preference reinforced by schools and parents. This is a widening participation issue as those on the vocational route are more likely to be from backgrounds with little tradition of higher education, to be older, and be looking for part-time study.

The main barriers to work-based learners progressing to HE are centred around financial concerns, issues about learning methods, and a lack of knowledge and understanding between each sector, i.e. HE admission tutors not understanding NVQs and NVQ assessors not understanding HE.

Research

Qualitative research was mainly carried out at the University of Wales Bangor (UWB), primarily at the School of Lifelong Learning’s (SoLL) training provision unit. The focus was upon two WBL vocational routes which can lead to HE, Care (with possible progression to Nursing) and Business and Administration (Business). Questionnaires, focus groups and structured interviews were used to elicit information from Education and Training Advisers (ETAs, NVQ assessors), HE admission tutors, work-based learners, staff in a range of academic institutions as well as from agencies like the Careers Service and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW).

Quantitative data proved hard to come by: HEFCW do not keep records on progression from WBL to HE and student records at UWB hold no clear data. According to admission staff “only a handful” of students enter with only vocational qualifications: working mature applicants are usually required to do an Access course.

Barriers to progression

The main barriers identified in the research process support findings from previous research in widening participation.

- Perceptions of and attitudes to HE: typically learners following work-based programmes regard HE as something far beyond their reach and capability. One ETA felt that varying levels of confidence

informed learners' attitudes while another thought that learners saw HE as "something beyond their reach – too intellectual rather than practical – and scary."

- Financial barriers: it was evident that learners and some assessors were unaware of the costs of HE and of any available financial support. They were, however, perceived as unaffordable. An assessor felt that following HE courses part-time for financial reasons precluded students from reaching their potential and an academic tutor also felt that financial concerns could be "an especially high barrier" for this group of students.
- Learning methods: a clear pattern emerged suggesting that the leap "from workplace to classroom" presented a very real barrier for those wishing to progress. There is evidence that support and encouragement from employers does little to persuade potential candidates.
- Commitments: lack of time, personal and work commitments were the most frequently cited barriers to progression identified during the research. Shift working presents another barrier. As one care assessor put it: "learners often start working in the sector because the hours can be fitted around other commitments ... many feel that progressing to HE is a dream and that the barriers are too great for them to overcome."
- Lack of understanding: there is evidence of widespread lack of information among learners and academics. The former are not often aware of available pathways and the latter can be unfamiliar with non-academic qualification levels. "I often seek advice from other admission staff on NVQ equivalents" said one.
- Employer Support: Research suggests that employers and staff within the university itself support and encourage work-based learners to progress into HE. Common perceptions on behalf of employers emerged. They were often reluctant to allow staff time off to attend university. Many employers felt threatened, fearing staff would leave once they had started an HE course.
- Academic support: It became clear that academic staff found that non-traditional entrants often need extensive support. Admission staff within the School of Nursing, for example, find that vocational learners often require individual support with assignment writing and study skills and have difficulty in understanding theory and abstract concepts.

Other findings identify the following issues:

- Work based learning gives the learner insight into learning and can also give them confidence in terms of achieving qualifications
- Work based learners develop a sense of discipline. They are used to meeting targets and often proactive in terms of research

Smoothing the transition

Developing study skills is key. The School of Lifelong Learning incorporate the introductory modules 'Learning to Learn' and 'Identities' at the start of their degree courses.

Progression routes available

Progression routes in HE exist within the school of Lifelong Learning through Foundation Degrees in Management of Care and in Early Childhood and Learning Support Studies. The School of Nursing also offers degrees. Business and Administration progression routes exist within the School of Business at UWB. The School of Lifelong Learning offer other part-time, flexible degree programmes.

Conclusion

The shift from vocational to academic study is significant and transition needs to be handled carefully. It appears that there is a new market of potential HE candidates who, with the right support, guidance and encouragement from employers, assessors and staff can make the transition successfully.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strong marketing of foundation and part-time degrees to vocational learners nearing completion
2. Step into HE module established by SoLL could be developed specifically for vocational learners. Could be provided in the workplace
3. Learning to Learn and Identities to be promoted to vocational learners who may lack study skills
4. Collaborative marketing between Schools of Business and Nursing
5. Study sessions to be delivered in workplaces and training days for ETAs on vocational pathways to HE
6. Information packs for ETAs to distribute
7. Confidence-building knowledge-based seminars
8. Marketing courses to employers
9. Raise profile of WBL as alternative access to HE
10. Taster courses/sampler sessions to be put on by HE institutions
11. Engage employers: e.g. “A taste of HE for business success” workshop delivered at the workplace, together with academic staff
12. Develop courses relevant to individual job; tailor-made degrees relevant to industry
13. Develop literacy skills by introducing essays instead of witness testimonies; introduce to use of evidence-based practice and appropriate literature
14. Use Blackboard as forum for vocational learners to be able to share experiences of HE learners
15. Deliver HE in the workplace: on-line learning and accredited taster courses
16. Option of free Learning to Learn module on completion of full framework
17. Dedicated section on WBL as option to access HE in UWB prospectus
18. Develop part-time, work-related courses at SoLL
19. Provide workplace mentors

6. TRANSNATIONAL WORK

GWLAD is part of the transnational partnership REAL – READY FOR EUROPEAN ADULT LEARNING, which has as its other partners:

- CFA LA NOUE (France)
- DECLIC (Belgium)
- Bridge to Education (Czech Republic)

The partners were chosen because of shared educational or training interests or similar local economies; but more specifically on innovative approaches to accessing learning and training. Each partner had its specific interests; both CFA La Noue and UWB in the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (AP(E)L), CFA la Noue, UWB and Bridge to Education in the motivation of target groups, and DECLIC in e-learning methodologies.

Four meetings were held during the project, one in each of the partners' countries. The first transnational conference, early on in the project's lifetime, was held in Bangor in November, 2005. Partners from France and the Czech Republic, in addition to our domestic partners, were in attendance. Our partners outlined their organisation's main activities and introduced what they anticipated carrying out as their GWLAD activity. The conference included two workshops, one on motivation, the other on the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). Both workshop groups decided on the production of comparative studies and carried out preliminary work. The second transnational conference was held in Liege, in Belgium, in March 2006, with partners from all four countries in addition to DECLIC's partners. This included a workshop on developing an e-learning database for tutors, to share good practice and experiences (both good and bad) on running e-learning courses. The third transnational conference was held in Dijon, in France, in December 2006, and was attended by all four partners. The workshops on motivation and APEL continued their work on the comparative studies, and a workshop on e-communities led by DECLIC also took place. Presentations were made on aspects of each visiting transnational group to CFA la Noue's partners and guests. GWLAD's presentation was on "Working with Volunteers". The final transnational conference was held in Sedmihorky, in the Czech Republic, at the beginning of June, 2007. All four partners attended, and the comparative studies were launched:

Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (AP(E)L) in Wales and France

Motivation and retention of target groups before and during training

Staff exchanges took place as part of our transnational activity. Six people from the Czech partnership visited north Wales in July 2006. Preparatory work had been undertaken to ascertain their specific interests, and a varied series of visits to see GWLAD activities and meet GWLAD's domestic partners and other institutions of interest took place; one of these was to the automotive centre at Rhyl College, part of Coleg Llandrillo. Because this was of particular interest to our Czech partners, a member of Coleg Llandrillo staff accompanied our reciprocal visit to the Czech Republic in October 2006. We visited institutions of interest, project activities, and met with local and regional political representatives.

At all the events we have had the opportunity to share common experience and good practice. Our understanding of different attitudes to learning and training in different countries has increased, and strong links have been forged with partners, especially from the Czech Republic, whose local economy and community learning activities have the most in common with us, which have the potential for future collaborative working beyond the lifetime of GWLAD.

7. INTERIM CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As this is an interim report any conclusions we come to and recommendations we make are provisional and subject to modification over the next few months.

Various conclusions and recommendations have been made in the individual sections of this report; the following section provides a summary of some of these.

Barriers to Learning in Rural Areas

Learners in rural areas face many of the same barriers as those in more populated areas; these include financial barriers such as course fees and the cost of course materials, psychological barriers such as lack of self-confidence and overcoming previous negative educational experiences, and more practical barriers in understanding the structures and systems of educational providers. However there are additional barriers for those learning in rural areas. The main ones we identified were transport, childcare, lack of information and issues around courses in terms of, for example, duplication and lack of paths to progression. A large proportion of our learners and those we talked to did not have access to their own transport making it impossible for most of them to attend courses outside their immediate town or village. Childcare was also a problem for learners who were parents of young children. Where childcare was available it was often in English only and therefore unacceptable to many Welsh speaking parents. Most people in rural areas rely on informal childcare using their own trusted networks of family and friends; it was not possible via the project for the cost of this to be reimbursed as the childcare was not being provided by registered childminders. It became clear during the course of the research period of the project that many people find it difficult to get information. This was the case for a broad range of services and facilities – from bus timetables to available courses and welfare rights. There is a need for information hubs in each community in accessible, non-threatening locations. Duplication of courses appears to be fairly common with different institutions providing the same sort of courses in the same location. People complained that providers kept putting on the same course and that progress was only possible by attending a local college rather than being available in the community. Our recommendations here are:

- Learning opportunities need to be provided in suitable locations for learners – at times this will mean running relatively small classes in village locations.
- Childcare is a significant barrier, and ways should be sought of increasing the numbers of registered Welsh speaking childminders in rural areas, and of making it possible to fund the kind of informal childcare that many parents trust and prefer.
- Information needs to be readily available in people's own communities. One Communities First worker suggested that Tourist Information Centres should be community information resources as well. Another community worker suggested health centres.
- Colleges need to work together to provide rural learning centres.

Engaging with New Learners

Most of the GWLAD work packages sought to engage with new learners. Some attempts were more successful than others. Those that were the most successful generally had the following characteristics:

- Local people (community activists) already known in the community were most effective at bringing together an initial group of learners. Even extensive marketing/leafletting/posters was far less effective than this.
- Working with already existing groups was often a positive way of working. These groups often became larger and attracted more people to them once activities were under way.
- Empowering groups to make their own decisions about areas of learning was important. While it was advisable to indicate the kinds of provision that could be made available, groups were much more likely to become engaged when activities were of their own choosing. It is important that learning is enjoyable.
- It is important to use the right kind of people as trainers/tutors. They must have a good understanding of the target groups and skills and experience with adult learners. Sometimes members of the groups themselves can take on this role.
- Flexibility in delivering learning is important. Some new learners have difficulty in attending learning sessions and lack time management. Tutors/trainers will need to be patient and be willing to repeat and rearrange sessions when needed.

Approaches to Learning

In some of the work packages we investigated and trialled out different approaches to learning looking at distance learning, blended learning, the use of virtual learning environments, and so on. These approaches are often put forward as being particularly appropriate for rural areas. Our conclusions and recommendations in this area are as follows:

- Distance learning approaches are some people's preferred way of learning, both for practical and more psychological reasons. However, many people value some face-to face contact with tutors and other students even when they opt for a 'distance' or 'blended' learning course.
- Learning technologies such as 'podcasts' and 'Blackboard' (a VLE) may be seen most often as a useful addition to other forms of delivering learning rather than as necessarily replacing face-to-face learning.

Partnership Working

One of the key approaches used by GWLAD was partnership working. This included both the formal partnership of the project and many other partnerships during the course of the project. Some of our observations on partnership working are:

- Many of the activities could not have happened without partnerships. This was undoubtedly the most essential ingredient of our project
- Partnerships allowed us access to a wide range of contacts and expertise.
- Successful partnership requires time and good lines of communication.
- A project such as GWLAD which lasts for two to three years allows enough time to develop strong links and trust between partners which will allow for continued links beyond the lifetime of the project.
- Not all partners were able to commit for the lifetime of the partnership. Changes in structures or personnel of partners limited the engagement of some partners for the duration of the project.

Reacting to the unexpected

Over the duration of the project we were able to react to some new developments. The most notable of these was the work we were able to carry out with recent migrants from Eastern Europe. The size of this groups and the awareness of their needs has grown considerably over the time of the project and EQUAL funding has allowed us to respond to some of these. Other changes we have made during the course of the project have included changing the nature of planned activities as the needs of our beneficiaries became clearer and moving to different groups of beneficiaries when some of our planned groups became unavailable.

Conclusion

Throughout the project our focus has been on EQUAL's principles of innovation, empowerment and equal opportunities and all are embedded in every initiative we and our partners have instigated. Diverse aspects of delivering learning in innovative and empowering ways have been piloted. Learning has been a key element throughout: for beneficiaries, for those who have delivered learning and for all involved in our development partnership. We have all learned a great deal from each other, and continue to do so. This is work in progress and we look forward to sharing our mutual learning as widely as possible as the project draws to a close at the end of the year.

