

Professional Careers Education and Guidance Digital Forum Wales

Online meeting: Wednesday 25th May 2022, 10am – 12.30pm

Meeting theme: “The next normal: supporting and enhancing wellbeing at work in unsettled times: impact, identity and income.”

How adult education enables refugees to create new futures in Wales

Introduction

Good afternoon. My name is Kathryn Robson, and I’m the Chief Executive of Adult Learning Wales. I’m very pleased to be with you today. Thank you very much for inviting me. Diolch yn fawr iawn.

Carolyn has asked me to speak about our Organisation, and how adult education enables refugees to create new futures in Wales. There’s quite a bit to say on this.... lots of exciting developments, some great opportunities, and a few challenges too! It’s great to be here to share our experiences and I hope in around 15-20 minutes or so you will have a reasonable understanding of what we do and how we fit into today’s theme. I will provide a copy of my notes and Carolyn will share with this group. Let me start by telling you a bit about our organisation first, before I move on to our work with refugees, asylum seekers and Third Country Nationals*.

About us:

Adult Learning Wales is a national organisation, operating across all regions and communities in Wales. With around 25,000 enrolments annually (in a normal year), we are the largest provider of pre-entry to professional level qualifications, delivering 50% of all Adult Community Learning (ACL) provision in Wales. We work in partnership with local authorities, further and higher education, the Third Sector and many other partners and employers.

The curriculum is delivered through a range of online, blended and face-to-face learning, which includes essential skills, employability, arts and crafts, plant machinery operation, youth and community playwork, counselling, the Award in Education and Training, digital

skills, confidence building, British Sign Language, health and wellbeing, family learning.... I could go on and on. It's wide ranging and far reaching that's for sure! We're a designated Further Education Institution, a registered Charity and a Company limited by Guarantee. Our income is £8M annually and 95% of our funding comes from the Welsh Government education budget.

We are a membership organisation, and our Voluntary Movement promotes advocacy through our members, branches, volunteers, staff, partners, and other stakeholders. We raise important issues that affect the lives of families in Wales, through campaigns, lobbying, research activities, consultation, and democratic engagement. Through our activities we aim to take a lead role in advancing active citizenship and supporting citizens rights and entitlements. (Wellbeing of Future Generations Act).

Our learners tell us every day that their lives have been changed for the better, many of our learners who have experienced ill health, trauma and other difficulties tell us that their experience with us has, in fact, been life saving.

Our work with refugees, asylum seekers and Third Country Nationals

In terms of our work with refugees, asylum seekers and Third Country Nationals, we work with a number of strategic partners including Welsh Government, the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership, Welsh Resettlement Schemes, (EYST) - Ethnic Youth Support Scheme, the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy Scheme, Further Education Colleges and the University of South Wales. We're also working across Wales on leading initial assessments for Ukrainian nationals entering the country through the host family schemes and as part of an emerging resettlement programme. This enables a structured and co-ordinated approach for curriculum and support services for everyone seeking sanctuary in Wales.

Our offer is broadly divided into two main strands,

1. Classes to support with integration and;

2. ESOL classes – that is English for Speakers of Other Languages Classes (we have also introduced WSOL – that is... Welsh for Speakers of Other Languages in partnership with Y Ganolfan Dysgu Cymraeg.

All this provision is funded through a mixture of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Reach ReStart Integration Project and core funding from Welsh Government's education budgets. We use a mixture of online and face-to-face delivery. As you can imagine, the facemask requirements during Covid times, was particularly challenging for language classes, and we had to find ways to adapt. Fortunately, the regulations for classroom teaching did allow some flexibility, but nevertheless, it was a tough time, and it's a relief to see the restrictions lifted. However, understandably, there is still some fear and uncertainty, and we are still experiencing higher than normal absences and drop out.

During that time, we adapted and moved at pace.....

- Move from 100% face-to-face to 100% online
- Challenges: connectivity, devices, language barriers, support
- Benefits: digital skills, more women, flexibility

So back to two main strands: integration and language classes:

Our integration programme includes opportunities for learners to join informal conversation clubs, crafting and woodwork sessions, self-care and wellbeing and learn about life in the UK and Wales, including Welsh culture, heritage and the arts. We also prepare learners for driving theory tests, our family learning programmes are a strong feature including our “read stories with your children classes” and we also run cooking and sewing skills classes. We also provide a “toolkit for new arrivals in Wales” which is very important in that transition period to a new country. We focus on content that is enabling, e.g. health and safety for work purposes, food hygiene, getting to the doctors, hospital appointments, bus timetables, welcomed, feel part of the community etc.

We have also arranged trips to the Hay Festival and various places of interest in Wales including Conwy Castle, and the National Museum of Wales.

Part of our success in supporting cultural awareness and integration are initiatives like the class we ran for a group of women from an Asian community in Grangetown in Cardiff. It started off as an ICT Course at Grangetown Primary School – which led to them producing a recipe book. The sales of which raised funds for the school. The group lacked confidence and self-esteem and discussions highlighted a sense of disconnect from British society, as the group mainly stayed within their immediate (Grangetown) community and very rarely ventured out of the city to the rest of Wales.

Class tutor Martyn Watkins recognized that this same element featured in another women's group he taught in Llanhilleth near Ebbw Vale who met in a Chapel. They talked about the fact that they had never met any Muslims or Asians and would not know how to react if they did. So it was suggested that the two groups met. So they got together, and, over a shared lunch of Pakistani, Yemeni and Welsh treats the women learned about the history of the chapel and the surrounding area, exchanged stories and discussed food, cultures and religions, and were all amazed by their similarities. The visit was a huge success where the women formed strong bonds, and now have a new appreciation and a better understanding of each other.

I'm pleased to say that some of the Grangetown group, went on to achieve Teaching Assistant qualifications, and now work at the school. One learner set up her own catering business.

Our ESOL classes range from pre-entry level to level 2 and support around 4000 learners per year. This is growing at pace as more conflict across the globe leads to more demand for English skills as people arrive in the Country. Many of our learners have successful careers in their home countries, but often their qualifications are not accepted here. Therefore, our work extends to strategic policy in collaboration with the Learning and Work Institute and Welsh Government in driving forward the agenda for Recognised Prior Learning, to support people in becoming economically active as soon as possible. I can think of one learner

Shabnam, a refugee from Afghanistan and a qualified HR professional who fled the conflict in her country only to find herself having to start from scratch in terms of her academic and professional profile, as her home country qualifications were not recognised here. I'm happy to say that with our support and the support of many people around her, together with her own determination and talent she is making good progress. But there is much work to do to develop policy to enable other people like Shabnam to be recognised for the skills and experiences they bring and to be able to transition into their professions they have brought with them from their home countries. We continue to work on that. Conversely, we often see ESOL learners come to class who are lacking basic literacy skills in their own language let alone English this is very challenging for them and for our tutors as you can imagine. Many of our learners have significant health issues and lack confidence. When we talk about helping people to create new futures, sometimes we need to recognise that pace of change for some of our learners comes in small steps, and achievable milestones. e.g. catching the bus, getting to class, switching their camera on etc.

Speaking of challenges, we are often faced with conflicting opinions and beliefs on cultural and religious grounds. Some of our male learners, for example, do object to being in a mixed gender class, and have been known to refuse to be taught by a female tutor. We have to be quite firm at times and explain the approaches we take to education and that it is not always possible to accommodate all requirements. However, we do try to find ways to overcome some of these challenges. For example we have run "Women Only" classes, and our online offer has been hugely popular too (as I said before), enabling women (who are normally the main carers) to juggle their classes and childcare.

We are also working towards becoming a TrACE (Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences) informed organisation, that is committing to adopting a toolkit together with extensive training which will enable our staff to be aware of the affects of Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences, and access support services for learners affected by such events in their lives.

In supporting people to create new futures in Wales, our ESOL classes extend to employability skills and preparing learners to be “job ready”, to compliment all the other aspects of our provision and integration programmes. Essentially, we’re here to help and support people from across the globe, who bring with them lots of skills, talent, determination, resilience and essentially want to do well.

So that’s us in a nutshell. I hope you found this informative. Very happy to take questions!

Diolch yn fawr

Thank you

***Third country national (TCN)** is a term often used in the context of [migration](#), referring to individuals who are in transit and/or applying for visas in countries that are not their country of origin (i.e. country of transit), in order to go to a destination country that is likewise not their country of origin. In the [European Union](#), the term is often used, together with "[foreign national](#)" and "non-EU foreign national", to refer to individuals who are neither from the EU country in which they are currently living or staying, nor from other [member states of the European Union](#).^[1]

In terms of employment, the term is often used to designate "an employee working temporarily in an assignment country, who is neither a national of the assignment country nor of the country in which the corporate headquarters is located."^[2]