

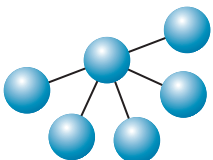
**Evaluation of
Learning Challenge Fund
Final Mini Evaluation Report**

Powys Basic Skills

Powys CCET



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Powys Basic Skills Project

Background and aims

- 1.1.1. The Powys Basic Skills Project was funded by LCF between August 2003 and March 2006. It was the second phase of a CCET development to improve basic skills provision in Powys. The aim of the project has been to work in partnership to provide a quality assured framework and infrastructure and to widen community access to innovative basic skills training. Phase 1, also sponsored by ELWa, developed a network of 49 partnering organisations who contributed to identifying learners and learning needs. It also developed an infrastructure to deliver professional assessment and individual Training Needs Analysis to learners. The project was seen to fit well with ELWa's "Essential Skills Goals for Mid Wales".
- 1.1.2. Coleg Powys, on behalf of Powys CCET, made a submission to LCF in September 2002. The project was approved in principle in May 2003 and then extended contract negotiations took place for 16 months. The contract was signed in September 2004 with an end date of July 2005 but this end date was subsequently extended until March 2006.
- 1.1.3. The project was a partnership and the contractor (Coleg Powys) agreed to act as lead body for delivery on behalf of the members of Powys CCET. The CCET, not being a legal body, could not enter into the contract.
- 1.1.4. The objectives of the LCF project were to:
 - Develop and deliver basic skills awareness training for a wide range of organisations
 - Identify and train basic skills tutors
 - Identify delivery organisations and signposting processes
 - Develop further the basic skills partnership with key stakeholders.
- 1.1.5. Following the LCF project it was planned to deliver the learning to identified individuals and small groups in the community, using ESF and other funding sources.

Project structure and funding

- 1.1.6. The project was supported very effectively at a range of levels.
 - Management Committee met monthly with clear terms of reference. Partner contributions to meetings were seen as "in kind". The initial Chair resigned but was effectively replaced.
 - Operation Group was made up of representatives of partner organisations. The agenda moved towards training and awareness raising and this is considered to have gelled the group together.
 - There was a CCET project manager (the first one went on maternity leave and she was replaced effectively) and other project officers supported the project

manager, from Coleg Powys, WEA and the County Council. Coleg Powys also appointed 2 project mentors with relevant expertise and qualifications in basic skills.

- 1.1.7. Powys Basic Skills was allocated approximately £201,000 over 19 months from the LCF. Further match funding came from partners and from the Basic Skills Agency.

1.2. LCF evaluation methodology

- 1.2.1. Shared Intelligence has been commissioned by ELWa to evaluate the Learning Challenge Fund on an ongoing basis. This comprises a Mini-Evaluation of each of the LCF projects, as well as an assessment of the LCF's progress as a scheme. The Mini-Evaluations are not intended to duplicate the projects' own evaluations which are a requirement of their LCF contracts with ELWa.

- 1.2.2. The LCF evaluation programme began in 2003. The first stage of the evaluation reviewed the process of setting up and administering the Learning Challenge Fund. The evaluation programme was extended out to individual projects in summer 2004. The Powys Basic Skills Project was funded for just 19 months from August 2004 until March 2006. This evaluation is based on:

- Two meetings in Newtown in July 2004 and May 2005 with the project manager and colleagues, which were also attended by the ELWa contract manager
- Attendance at a Basic Skills Conference in Llandrindod Wells in March 2006 (attended by 56 delegates), involving further discussions with project and contract managers
- Interviews with the Principal of Coleg Powys and with the representative of the Basic Skills Agency
- Regular telephone and e-mail contact with the project manager
- A review of project documentation and regular monitoring reports
- A review of the project's internal evaluation report, ELWa/DELLS' closure report and their own evaluation report.

- 1.2.3. It is believed that such a spread of consultation and research has provided the basis for a comprehensive assessment of activities, outputs and strategic impacts from the perspective of ELWa, stakeholders and the project manager.

2. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

2.1. Project activities

Training tutors

- 2.1.1. During the project the original C&G 9282 certificate was replaced by a new qualification - C&G 9295 certificate in Adult Learner Support. Training was promoted via partner organisations, email and websites, Operational Group meetings and general advertising. Coleg Powys delivered the courses due to their delivery experience and their track record in supporting new tutors in the community. Eight courses were run in Brecon, Newtown and Llandrindod Wells, benefiting 28 organisations. 83 students enrolled on the courses.
- 2.1.2. The higher level (Level 3) C&G 9483 qualification was offered to 11 learners and 7 tutors completed the course. They were awarded with their certificates at the conference in March 2006. Two students went on to enrol on the University of Wales Newport level 4 Certificate for Adult Literacy Teachers and they will complete in June 2006. The successful students will be able to run a Level 4 course in Mid Wales in future.

Trainer toolkits

- 2.1.3. Toolkits 1-3 were specified and acquired to support those undertaking training and beginning to work with learners. They were sent out to organisations that confirmed they were supporting learners and made available through the 3 Coleg Powys libraries to all partner organisations.

Working with Voluntary Sector

- 2.1.4. Lines of communication were established to use the sector as a source of signposting. The PAVO website and newsletter was used to advertise the Basic Skills project. A number of organisations have played a full role on the project but relatively few were able to commit staff or volunteer time to undertake tutor or awareness training. The ELWa closure report suggested that the voluntary sector's input was disappointing and then target was only met due to the project manager's personal commitment.

2.2. Project progress

- 2.2.1. The ELWa closure report states that the project delivered well – the infrastructure elements were delivered on time and budget; the learning elements were delivered on time; the project delivered its objectives and was responsive to needs. It concludes that the key strength of the project was the collaboration work between partners and the commitment shown by partners.
- 2.2.2. The Basic Skills Agency representative felt that "Hazel's regular emails and updates were very helpful; they kept pressure and enthusiasm up". The project manager was also the subject of a number of accolades at the March 2006 conference. The Principal of Coleg Powys believed that the project management was the key strength – the glue that kept the project and the partnership together. He felt

that the LCF had allowed the partnership “to form, storm and norm and now it was beginning to perform” as it moved towards delivery to learners.

- 2.2.3. The ELWa contract manager said that one of the key successes was that partner organisations could now identify basic skills needs in their own staff and clients.

2.3. Project outputs

	Target	Achieved
Trainers engaging in C&G 9295 training	40	83
Trainers completing C&G 9295 training	40	40 complete* 30 Module 1 only
Trainers engaging in C&G Level 3 training	10	11
Trainers completing C&G Level 3 training	10	7
Trainers supporting learners	40	40
Learners accessing support already	400	416
Learners engaging further	200	317
Voluntary organisations engaged	100	101

* Awaiting certificate evidence in some cases

- 2.3.1. The ELWa closure report stated that the learning elements were overall delivered on time. There were some issues with required paperwork providing evidence that trained tutors were actually working with basic skills learners after completing their courses. So the figures of tutors supporting learners could actually be higher
- 2.3.2. Not all trainers actually completed the C&G 9295 course. A number of non-completers also went on to support learners within their organisations having developed their skills to some extent.
- 2.3.3. The voluntary sector engagement target was met eventually but ELWa believed the input could have been more proactive.
- 2.3.4. The partnership elements of the project were considered to have been carried out effectively.

3. PROJECT OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

3.1. Outcomes and benefits

3.1.1. The outcomes and impacts are difficult to measure quantifiably because the Powys Basic Skills project was about further developing partnership infrastructure and about identifying and training potential basic skills tutors. It was not expected that these tutors would actually go out into the community and work with learners during the life of the LCF project, other than in relatively small numbers. That was planned as a follow-up activity with funding from other sources.

3.1.2. However the outcomes have been shown to include:

- Building of an effective partnership across Powys;
- Raising awareness of the basic skills issue and the identification of learners with basic skills needs;
- Building a cohort of fully trained and enthusiastic basic skills tutors – including two Level 4 trained tutors who can then provide Level 4 training back in Mid Wales;
- Engaging with a small number of employers to address their basic skills needs and the potential impact on competitiveness.

3.1.3. The ELWa closure report concluded that “The project has been effective in bringing basic skills to an area where it has never been prioritised before. It has brought partners to the table.”

4. CONTRIBUTION TO LCF OBJECTIVES

4.1. Aims of the Learning Challenge Fund

4.1.1. This section looks at the extent to which the Powys Basic Skills Project contributed to the aims and objectives of the Learning Challenge Fund. In summary, the key objectives and success criteria for the LCF, are as follows:

- innovation and new approaches in learning provision;
- a strategic approach at national, regional and local levels;
- collaboration between learning providers leading to improved learning networks;
- improving access and widening participation;
- delivering more and high-quality learning outcomes from existing resources (value for money); and
- effective mainstreaming of successful projects.

4.1.2. The contribution of each project towards the aims of the LCF is being assessed, partly to see whether the projects that were funded 'fitted' with the LCF's aims, and partly to see whether the LCF as a whole achieved its aims. Therefore, this section summarises both the intentions of the project ('fit'), and the achievements of the project in terms of the LCF aims.

4.1.3. The ELWa closure report states that "The project has created a strategic impact at county level; has encouraged collaboration between learning providers; has set the foundations for improving access and widening participation and for delivering more learning outcomes. The project has enabled a more strategic and focused approach to be taken to the delivery of basic skills training in Powys".

Innovation

4.1.4. The whole approach of the Powys Basic Skills project was innovative. Building a partnership, developing awareness, involving the voluntary sector, training tutors and beginning to deliver basic skills training are all very innovative – when considered in such a rural setting in Wales.

Strategic approach

4.1.5. The project has been strategic in building county-wide infrastructure, partnerships and provision in support of the £40m National Basic Skills Strategy for Wales (Words Talk – Numbers Count). The basic skills focus is in line with employability and worklessness policy and with economic strategies aimed at increasing the competitiveness and productivity of local businesses. The project developed a partnership strategy for basic skills in Powys – and the involvement of the Basic Skills Agency means there are opportunities for the lessons learned to be rolled out in other rural areas of Wales.

Collaboration

- 4.1.6. The project was successful in building a collaborative approach involving the College, private providers (Powys Training), the voluntary sector and the County Council. It also engaged strongly with the Basic Skills Agency which provided an important “best practice” element.

Improving access and widening participation

- 4.1.7. The project was focused on the development of infrastructure and capacity building for basic skills in Powys. The impact on basic skills learners is only beginning to be felt (with at least 416 beneficiaries already) but – once the new basic skills regional infrastructure is in place – the cohort of trained tutors and the higher level of awareness will allow provision to be rolled out across the county. The aim of basic skills is to widen access and participation by engaging groups and individuals in learning who have missed out on its benefits previously. The Basic Skills Agency representative said that the project has already changed people’s lives.
- 4.1.8. The creation of a partnership and the development of infrastructure in the county will ensure access and participation in an area where it has never been prioritised before. However is there capacity to address all 19,000 people in Powys with literacy problems?

Delivering more and high-quality learning outcomes

- 4.1.9. Again, the project did not set out to achieve this during its lifetime but it is expected that such outcomes will be achieved over time when the cohort of qualified tutors are able to get out and work with individual learners and groups.

4.2. Sustainability and mainstreaming

- 4.2.1. The Powys Basic Skills project completed in March 2006 and it is not yet clear exactly how basic skills will be taken forward in future. The idea of four ELWa/DELLS-led regional basic skills consortia was outlined at the conference in March 2006, with a focus on collaborative partnership. The Principal of Coleg Powys confirmed his view that relevant colleges should be given the Lead Provider role in any future basic skills agenda. Other delegates suggested the identification of a lead organisation in each region and a strong project manager – in fact replicating the widely-held success factors from the Powys Basic Skills. The idea of ELWa/DELLS controlling the regional consortia – through funding, chairmanship and secretariat – was not favoured.
- 4.2.2. The ELWa closure report found that the project “has delivered for learners and there is potential for future development”.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND LEARNING POINTS

5.1. Conclusions

- 5.1.1. The Powys Basic Skills project was a success and achieved the bulk of its operational targets despite a delayed start. Its partnership aspects were considered to have been particularly successful and the evidence for this was clear at the conference in March 2006. The decision to enhance the Operational Group by grafting on awareness and best practice sessions was a great success and led to increasing membership and attendance (at a phase in the project when interest might otherwise have been tailing off).
- 5.1.2. The training targets were achieved in most cases and the Basic Skills Agency have verified the quality of training and the standard of learning.
- 5.1.3. The weaknesses identified by the project in its own evaluation report related to:
- The late signing of the contract
 - The late appointment of the project mentors (linked to the late contract)
 - The delays by C&G and the Basic Skills Agency in releasing the Level 3 pilot course which had an impact on the numbers of learners and the achievement of the target
 - Project officers did not provide a consistent level of support because of other responsibilities
 - The difficulties in achieving the target of 100 voluntary organisations on board, despite the efforts of the project manager
 - The difficulty in getting paper evidence that tutors were working with learners
 - The limited engagement with employers (not a formal target)

5.2. Learning points

- 5.2.1. The key learning points would be that:
- The contracting period should be reduced in future to ensure project proposals can be implemented in line with planned timescales wherever possible;
 - Involvement by the Basic Skills Agency was a big plus, adding credibility to the project and a focus on quality (the participation of the Executive Director at the conference in March 2006 was evidence of the importance that the Agency accords to the Powys project);
 - The partnership building and maintenance, project management and best practice aspects of the project should be carried over to the new regional consortium approach to basic skills. The learning is too important and it must be captured and incorporated especially in rural areas.
 - However – would it work on a larger canvas? With multiple colleges, local authorities, providers and other stakeholders?

- 5.2.2. It was considered by the Principal of Coleg Powys that the two ELWa contract managers were very effective in “smoothing over the potential ELWa bureaucracy” and helping the project cope with reporting and performance management challenges. However he felt that the contracting stage was fraught and not conducive to thrashing out a set of appropriate objectives and indicators, and that this problem remained an issue throughout the project.