

Step Up Cymru mentoring scheme Evaluation report



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Foreword

I was delighted to read the evaluation report of the Step Up Cymru mentoring scheme. I have followed the progress of the scheme with interest and was very happy to be able to speak to some of the participants, who struck me as just the kind of new breed of politicians and activists that we need in Wales.

In the summer of 2009, I wrote an article for the Institute of Welsh Affairs entitled “Time to talk about women again”. The article challenged the assumption that we had broken through the glass ceiling of gender inequality in Wales and pointed to an underbelly of inequality across all sectors – for example, only a quarter of local councillors are women, there are fewer women on boards of Welsh Assembly Government sponsored bodies and the average female will expect to earn around £330,000 less throughout her career than her male counterpart. With the National Assembly election coming up in May 2011, we are already seeing several prominent women standing down or at risk in marginal seats. It seems that the much lauded gender equality that the Assembly has boasted since its inception might not last much longer.

At the same time as I wrote the article, the Welsh Local Government Association, the Welsh Assembly Government and the National Assembly for Wales were preparing to launch Step Up Cymru. The aim of the project was to offer a cohort of individuals from different, under-represented groups within a supportive environment to learn about democracy and politics in Wales. Ultimately, it was hoped that it would inspire participants to maintain their involvement and to offer a voice for their communities.

The scheme was established to offer participants a Mentor who could explain the structure of politics in Wales and to give participants the ‘insider view’ on who to contact and information sources. As the participants begin to make their own paths in Wales, we hope that they themselves will become role models for other individuals across Wales.

With participants representing most under-represented groups, including gender, race, sexual orientation, religion or belief, disability and age, some expressed concerns that the needs of specific groups might not be heard fully. This concluding report from the project indicates that Step Up Cymru has in fact benefited from its diverse membership. For example, one participant commented that “watching [another Mentee] growing in herself, and learning from her what racism is like to suffer was absolutely one of the strongest benefits.”

As we count down to Assembly and local elections this is absolutely the right time for the 34 individuals involved in the scheme to ensure their communities’ voices are properly heard. We need to celebrate diversity and difference for it will make Wales a better place to live and work. The new generation of politicians should better reflect our communities and citizens. We need to allow our new politicians to trailblaze and dare to be different by avoiding imitating traditional approaches, styles, dress, voice or behaviour.

Step Up Cymru has pioneered political mentoring of this kind. This report records and evaluates the outcomes of the scheme, considers how it might be developed for future participants and how the model could be utilised by other organisations across the UK. I wish the participants every success in their careers and I hope to see them as elected politicians or community activists in the not too distant future.

Professor Laura McAllister



Summary

The Step Up Cymru scheme was developed in partnership between the National Assembly for Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association and ran from October 2009 until April 2010. The impetus for the Step Up pilot scheme was the feedback and evaluation of the Operation Black Vote (OBV) shadowing scheme that ran in the National Assembly for Wales during 2007/2008, aimed at increasing black and other minority ethnic (BME) representation among political groups/parties.

In building on the work of the previous OBV scheme, the aim of the partnership was to increase the democratic participation and active citizenship of people in Wales who identified themselves as under-represented in politics and/or civil life.

The scheme involved Assembly Members and local councillors from across Wales volunteering to mentor people from under-represented groups and to invite them to shadow them in their roles as elected Members. Thirty-four mentoring pairs undertook the scheme across Wales.

This report evaluates the scheme's outcomes and provides a list of recommendations based on lessons learnt and evidence gathered. The partnership has used qualitative and quantitative evidence gathered from Mentors, Mentees and the scheme's Steering Group to evaluate the scheme.

The scheme has been a positive sign that there is a pool of talent and potential available across different communities throughout Wales. This in turn builds confidence and fosters a culture which values different insights and views of the world. The importance of this must not be under-estimated; by creating more inclusion and diversity across civil society, policies and public services are more likely to meet the needs of all communities and draw on the talents of the wider population.

When developing the scheme, the partnership was keen to share the lessons learnt and best practice and it is envisaged that the Step Up Cymru webpages will serve as a portal of information for any future scheme/proposal.

“It made me realise just how much many people still need to learn about public and civil life.”

Mentor

“The scheme offers a great opportunity for the Mentees, and even if they don't become involved in politics, they will always have a greater understanding of politics and democracy – and this will be passed onto friends and family.”

Steering Group member



Mentees at the launch of Step Up Cymru



Terry Rees and Heather Lewis, Mentees

Background

Rationale

The National Assembly for Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) created a partnership early in 2009 to develop a framework for an all-Wales mentoring scheme, Step Up Cymru, that would utilise both Assembly Members and local councillors as Mentors.

The Step Up Cymru scheme was developed as a result of feedback and evaluation of the Operation Black Vote shadowing scheme that ran in the National Assembly for Wales during 2007/2008 and aimed at increasing black and other minority ethnic (BME) representation among political groups/parties. A unique feature of the new Step Up Cymru scheme was the focus on increasing democratic participation and active citizenship across all under-represented groups. The partnership acknowledge Operation Black Vote's contribution to the initial design of the Step Up Cymru scheme and recognise its expertise in delivering schemes at local authority, Assembly and Westminster level.

The development of Step Up Cymru also pre-empted recommendation 20 from the 2009 Report of the Councillor Commission Expert Panel Wales: for "the Welsh Assembly Government to work in partnership with the National Assembly for Wales Commission, the Welsh Local Government Association and other relevant organisations to develop an all-Wales shadowing scheme which would provide opportunities for shadowing and mentoring people from under-represented groups by councillors and Assembly Members."

Funding

The partnership contributed to the resourcing of the pilot project with a budget of £90,000 to design, deliver and evaluate the project. The final outturn was £75,000. The partnership sought to obtain value for money and reduce costs wherever possible: expertise was pooled and shared, website and printing costs were absorbed by the partners, the estates were used to hold events at no extra cost and the partnership worked with existing initiatives in the public and voluntary sector to develop and deliver learning and development activities for the Mentees.

"I have shared – and will continue to share – the experiences and skills that I have gained from the Step Up Cymru programme with people in my community and service users that I support."

Mentee

"With this scheme I have been on such a journey, I have learnt and grown so much ... yet I have so much more to learn and do! My life is heading in a completely new direction and I am extremely happy with it."

Mentee

Project management

The overall project management of the scheme was undertaken by members of the partnership with the support of a Steering Group of representative organisations. The main purpose of the Steering Group was to:

- assist with the development and promotion of the scheme;
- advise on best practice as required;
- assist in the evaluation of the pilot scheme; and
- receive on-going reports from the Scheme Coordinator.

Terms of reference were designed and agreed by members of the Steering Group and partnership (Appendix 01).

A key action of the partnership in terms of managing the scheme was the appointment of a Scheme Coordinator to act as the main point of contact and reference for all elements of the scheme. Following a recruitment exercise, the Scheme Coordinator was appointed and took up post in June 2009.

Project aims

The scheme aimed to provide individuals from under-represented groups with an opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge to act as Community Ambassadors, advising and empowering others to become more actively engaged in civil society. As such, the partnership developed a set of aims for the scheme to:

- build links with under-represented groups;
- increase participants' knowledge of the political/democratic system in Wales to enable them to obtain a variety of skills with a view to considering further involvement in the civil and political sphere;
- increase the confidence and civic engagement of under-represented groups;
- advance the civic and community representation and diminish the deficit in democratic and civic participation of under-represented groups;
- enhance the understanding of and instil greater confidence in the National Assembly for Wales and Local Government among those groups and the public;
- give individual politicians, political parties, the National Assembly for Wales and Local Government in Wales, the opportunity to work with and gain greater insight into the experiences of under-represented groups and identify barriers to inclusion/participation;
- promote a positive message that under-represented communities in Wales can influence and bring about positive change by engaging with politicians and the democratic process.

The project aims serve as a metric for the project's efficacy. The evaluation of the Step Up scheme is explored on page 16, along with a conclusion on page 32 and recommendations on page 34.



Elizabeth Newton, Mentee



Annette Monks, Mentee

Project delivery

Promotion and recruitment

The project partners developed a promotion/recruitment strategy to ensure access to the scheme from across all communities in Wales. The partners and the Steering Group were particularly keen to encourage individuals to apply who had traditionally been disengaged from civil society and democratic processes. The scheme was promoted for six weeks through the partners and members of the Steering Group, using mailing lists, newsletters and online forums. A press release was distributed to the local and national media in an attempt to reach individuals who were not affiliated to any representative bodies or groups.

Recruitment of Mentors

There was no formal selection process or application required from Mentors, ie Assembly Members and local councillors. Party groups at the Assembly and local councils were briefed on what the scheme entailed. Assembly Members and councillors were invited to take part in the scheme and those that expressed an interest were provided with a guidance booklet covering:

- the background, need and purpose of the scheme;
- what is mentoring?
- the skills required to be a Mentor in this scheme;
- the benefits of mentoring;
- how the scheme would work/time commitment;
- how to set objectives and work programme;
- confidentiality agreement;
- contact details for information/support.

Recruitment of Mentees

The recruitment process needed to be accessible to encourage applications from individuals who often experience barriers to engaging in civil society. Members of the Steering Group were instrumental in the development of the recruitment process, highlighting potential obstacles specific to their stakeholders.

Application

Candidates were required to complete a simple, written application form to take part in the scheme. The form allowed candidates an opportunity to detail their reasons for applying, how they would positively use the experience in the future and any relevant experiences they may have. The Scheme Coordinator made reasonable adjustments for disabled candidates who might have considered the written form a barrier.

There were three assessment panels, comprising of the Scheme Coordinator, a partner representative and a member of the Steering Group. They were established to oversee the shortlisting process and written guidance was given to panel members to ensure fairness and consistency. The following criteria were established in order to shortlist candidates for the scheme:

- a need to be enthusiastic about politics/civic participation;
- a desire to learn more about the political sphere;
- an eagerness to act as a Community Ambassador, taking positive messages back to their community;
- a willingness to work flexibly around personal/work commitments;
- a need to have an understanding of some of the main social and political concerns of the under-represented group that they identified with.

A total of 79 applications were received, 58 were shortlisted and invited to attend an assessment centre. A breakdown of applicants' equality characteristics is at Appendix 03. Unsuccessful applicants were contacted via email or letter and were supplied with further information as to how they could find out more about democracy in Wales and how they could consider active citizenship.

“We believe that there is scope for the development of a UK-wide scheme similar to the Step Up Cymru mentoring scheme.”

Speaker's Conference Final Report

“I hoped that the scheme would be a real opportunity to gain an insight into the policy making processes of Wales, and in particular I wanted to learn how small community and voluntary groups can engage effectively with politicians.”

Mentee

“I think that we all assume that we know how government works, but when you really think about it it's not actually that clear to people who are not directly involved.”

Mentee

Assessment centres

Assessment centres were held in Cardiff, Swansea and Colwyn Bay with the following format:

- a presentation from a local councillor;
- a presentation from an Assembly outreach officer; and
- a series of group activities.

The assessment criteria used in these centres further developed those that were applied at the sifting process. This entailed assessing group interaction skills, listening skills and whether they were likely to benefit from the scheme.

The assessors were drawn from the Steering Group and partner organisations. Their role was to observe group tasks and make notes on each individual's contribution and interaction with others. To ensure fairness and objectivity, assessors rotated across the group activities which enabled each assessor to comment on each applicant. Some people demonstrated in the assessment centres that they were already politically active and/or active citizens and therefore they were not selected to participate to ensure that the limited places available were used to best effect. As result of this process, 36 candidates were selected to take part in the scheme. Before the scheme formally commenced however, one candidate dropped out and it was not possible to source a Mentor for another candidate, resulting in 34 Mentees participating in the scheme.

Pairing process

One of the most important elements of the scheme was the pairing process, which ensured, as far as possible, that the Mentor and Mentee would be able to work together easily. There was recognition that it was not possible or indeed necessary to make apparently 'perfect' matches. However, the partners and Steering Group identified three main factors for consideration when undertaking the pairing process:

- political affiliation;
- geographical compatibility;
- similarity in work/caring commitments.

Where participants were unsure of their political affiliation, the Smallest Political Quiz was used to place them on the political spectrum indicatively.

Mentees were contacted and informed of their success, given details of their Mentor and advised that their Mentor would contact them. Each Mentor received a profile of their Mentee and was asked to contact their Mentee before the launch event to arrange an initial meeting.

Experiences

The scheme was delivered over a period of six months from October 2009 to April 2010. During this time participants were required to have a minimum of ten 'experiences' with their Mentor, for example attending a council surgery, an Assembly committee meeting, constituency visit or campaigns.

Guidance and support

The project partners produced a guidance document suggesting possible experiences which were provided to both the Mentor and Mentee prior to the first meeting to aid the planning process. The document contained a formal agreement between the participants, outlining their commitment to the scheme. These documents are available on the Step Up Cymru webpages.

Learning and development

A training plan was offered to Mentees at the outset of the scheme; it consisted of a variety of courses aimed at increasing their knowledge, confidence and active citizenship (Appendix 05). Mentees were able to select any or all of the training available, or suggest ideas for learning and development. The Scheme Coordinator designed and arranged the training sessions and also kept Mentees informed of additional 'learning opportunities' such as optional attendance at events held by the partners and Steering Group member organisations.

“Perhaps a little more responsibility could be placed on Steering Group members to involve Mentees in the work and events of their organisation.”
Steering Group member

Communications

The project partners developed a communications plan prior to the scheme's commencement. Press releases were scheduled and website copy was developed for the main Step Up Cymru webpages hosted on the Assembly's website at:

www.assemblywales.org/step-up-cymru

The Scheme Coordinator provided the partners and Steering Group with regular progress updates and the Mentees received a monthly newsletter to keep them informed of news and events relating to the scheme. Mentees also recorded a journal of their experiences for publication on the webpages.

Opening and closing events

The scheme was launched 07 October 2009 with an event at the Senedd, Cardiff Bay. The event was hosted by the Rt. Hon. the Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas, Presiding Officer of the National Assembly for Wales, with speeches from:

- Cllr Lindsay Whittle, WLGA Spokesperson for Equality and Social Justice;
- Leighton Andrews AM, then Deputy Minister for Social Justice & Public Service Delivery;
- Ashok Viswanathan, Deputy Director of Operation Black Vote; and
- Liz Musa, a participant from the previous Assembly Operation Black Vote scheme.

Mentees received a guidance document at the launch of the scheme that provided more information on the scheme; explanation of time commitments; instructions and guidance on expense claims; and contact details for the Scheme Coordinator and Steering Group members.

The scheme formally ended on 21 April 2010 with a celebration at the Senedd, with Mentees' families invited. The event included speeches from four Mentees, the Assembly's Presiding Officer and Cllr Meryl Gravell, WLGA Presiding Officer and Mentor.

Publicity/recognition

The House of Commons Speaker's Conference Report on Parliamentary Representation (2009) commended Step Up Cymru as an initiative that could potentially be developed across the UK.

Evaluation

Methodology

Different research methodologies were used to capture both qualitative and quantitative data in order to evaluate the scheme in relation to its aims:

- Mentees’ pre- and post-scheme questionnaires;
- Mentors’ questionnaires;
- Steering Group questionnaires; and
- focus groups – one with members of the partnership, and one with Mentees.

Mentees’ questionnaire

The Mentees were provided with a survey questionnaire prior to taking part in the scheme to rate their knowledge of political institutions and roles in Wales and also to rate their confidence and understanding of politicians and different tiers of government in Wales. At the close of the scheme, Mentees were asked to complete the questionnaire again, with the addition of further questions to explore their confidence as an active citizen before and after the scheme and whether they voted or intended to vote at UK, the National Assembly and local elections.

Mentors’ questionnaire

Mentors were contacted by email and asked to respond to a series of questions relating to their experience of being involved in the scheme.

Steering Group’s questionnaire

The Steering Group members were invited to feedback on their experience of contributing to the scheme and were asked to identify lessons learnt and other approaches.

“For me, helping others to overcome the ‘terrors’ of getting involved in political processes was the most important factor.”

Mentor

“It was pleasing to see such a wide range of organisations supporting the initiative. It was also pleasing to hear how all the parties and many of the individual politicians had been so supportive. It also gave me the opportunity to build contacts and talk to other members of the Steering Group and hear their ideas for improving representation in public life.”

Steering Group member

Partners' focus group

The partners' focus group was led by an independent chair and invited all participants to provide their views on the following topics:

- partnership working;
- Steering Group;
- team work;
- recruitment and selection;
- scheme structure;
- mentoring relationships;
- training.

Mentees' focus group

Mentees were invited to take part in an independently facilitated focus group to further develop the quantitative data established from the questionnaires. The facilitator used an evaluative framework linked to the scheme objectives.

Evaluation methodology findings

Mentees were asked a series of questions in which they had to rate their knowledge and understanding of different elements of Welsh political life on a scale of one to ten (one – no understanding and ten – expert knowledge). These questions were asked at the beginning and end of the scheme. There were 22 responses to the pre-scheme questionnaire and 23 responses to the post-scheme questionnaire.



Bhunesh Napal, Mentee



Mentees at the close of Step Up Cymru

Chart 01: Understanding of roles and responsibilities of the different levels of government

The first question explored the Mentees’ understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the National Assembly for Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government, Local Government and the UK Government. As Chart 01 below shows, Mentees’ understanding of the different levels of government had significantly increased by the time the scheme had concluded.

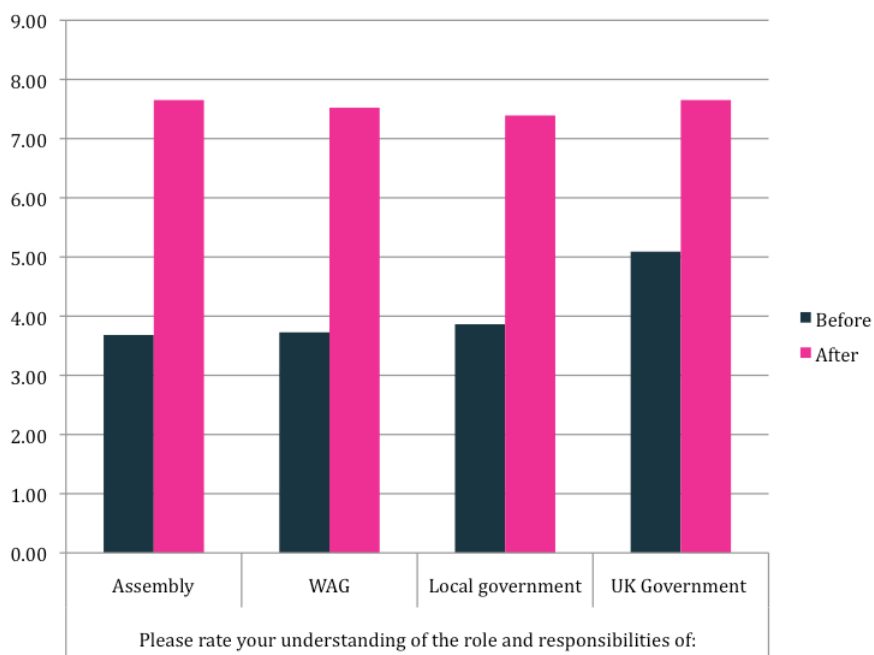
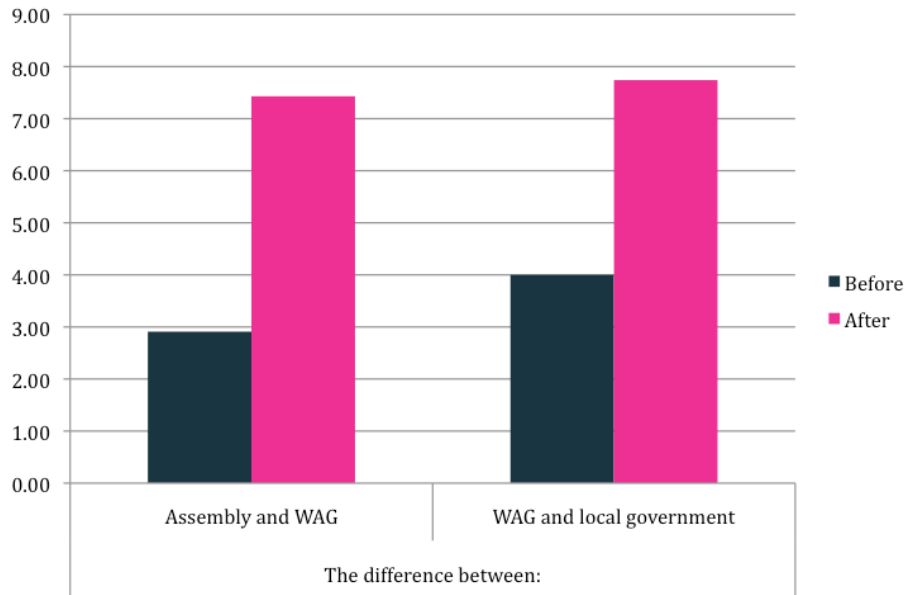


Chart 02: Understanding of the difference between political institutions

Mentees were asked to rate their understanding of the differences between the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government, and between the Welsh Assembly Government and local government. These questions were asked before and after the scheme. The results in Chart 02 below show that Mentees significantly improved their understanding of differences between the political institutions during the course of the scheme.



“I now understand how Welsh local and national government interacts with UK national government, depending on whether a power is or is not devolved. Furthermore, I am now aware that Parliament is accessible to everyone.”

Mentee

“The bringing together of the National Assembly for Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government and Welsh Local Government Association sends a strong, supportive message to organisations that improving representation is a major priority for the major governmental bodies in Wales.”

Steering Group member

“I have gained an immense amount of confidence, the ability to discuss and negotiate. I am not afraid to speak out!”

Mentee

Chart 03: Understanding of the role of different elected representatives

The understanding of the roles of politicians (Assembly Members, local councillors and Members of Parliament) was explored with the Mentees; Chart 03 below shows again an increased understanding. The responses relating to Assembly Members showed the least understanding of the role at the outset of the scheme; however by the close of the scheme there was a significant increase here where Mentees' understanding had more than doubled. The Mentee focus group reinforced this finding with the majority feeling that they better understood what politicians did with one commenting that "before I got accepted onto this scheme, I believed that the only thing that a politician did was to knock on your door at election time and ask you to vote for them."

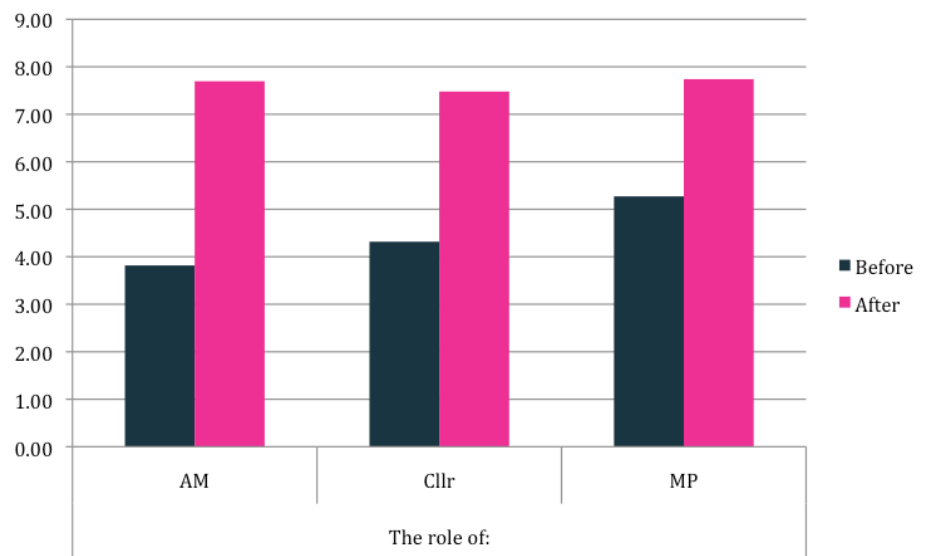
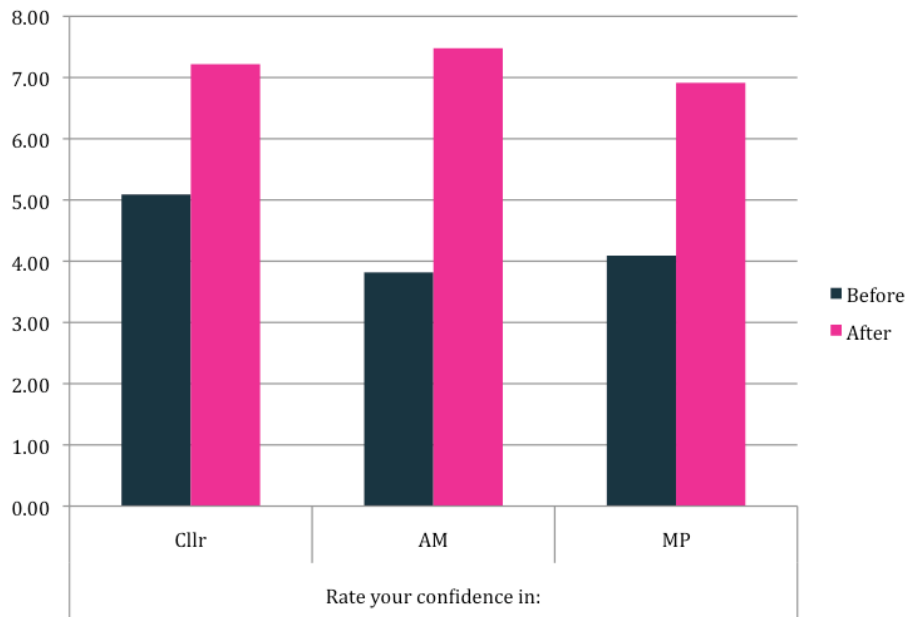


Chart 04: Confidence in elected representatives

When asked to rate their confidence in politicians at the start of the scheme, the participants returned average ratings of below 5 out of 10. The pre-scheme questionnaire was undertaken at the height of the publicity concerning the disclosure of MPs' allowances and this may have affected the ratings. Again, by the end of the scheme confidence had increased – particularly in Assembly Members (Chart 04).



Mentees were questioned further about what would discourage them from contacting politicians. While responses to the pre-scheme questionnaire included “because I don’t know how” and “they would not have respect for my opinion,” by the end of the scheme this had changed and Mentees stated that nothing would discourage them from contacting their politician, with one commenting, “I am no longer scared or apprehensive of speaking to or contacting these people as they are usually quite friendly, engaging and willing to hear my concerns.”

“In political life I have become more discerning about what I hear via media reports, and have a more open, wider view of political issues.”

Mentee

“On my way home from the event, I reflected on how narrow and jaundiced my view of politicians was and how days like this have already started to change my opinion”

Mentee

“I have learnt not to judge a politician by their media image.”

Mentee



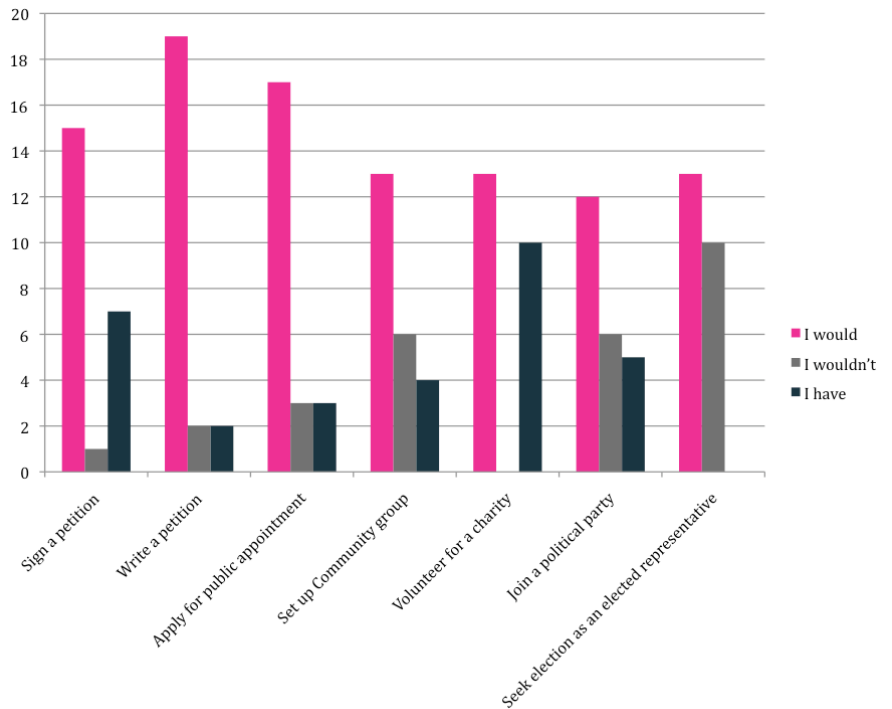
Sue Cooke, Mentee



Neelo Farr, Mentee

Chart 05: Level of active citizenship at the end of the scheme

Mentees were asked to rate themselves as active citizens with an average response of 4.4 out of 10 at the outset compared with 8.1 out of 10 by the end of the scheme (Chart 05). The levels of knowledge and understanding acquired may be a contributory factor to this increased level of confidence with one Mentee commenting during the focus group that “understanding politics and gaining knowledge of the way in which our democratic processes work, this building of knowledge makes you feel more confident.”



On completing the scheme participants were asked if they felt confident in carrying out activities such as setting up a community group. 56.5% of Mentees said that they would set up a community group, and a further 17.4% had already done so. This question also showed more than 50% of the Mentees that responded would consider joining a political party, with a further 21.8% having joined one through the duration of the scheme.

“I have joined a political party, I am an Assembly candidate for May 2011, I will be a city council candidate in 2012. “

Mentee

“Since the end of the scheme I have become the Chairperson of Carmarthenshire Disability Coalition for Action.”

Mentee

Scheme Coordinator

The role of Scheme Coordinator was central to the concept of the all-Wales scheme with members of the Steering Group, partnership, Mentors and Mentees providing evidence of the importance of the role. Having a Scheme Coordinator was seen by Mentees at the focus group to be pivotal in the success of the scheme and useful to have a single point of contact for information and advice. "The Scheme Coordinator went out of his way to make this a positive experience for people." When reflecting on how one of the partners would have liked to commit more time to the scheme, he commented "how well the Scheme Coordinator had kept me informed of events as they unfolded." One of the Mentors also commented that "the scheme was well organised by the Scheme Coordinator."

Recruitment/Selection/Assessment

Distribution

The scheme was designed to encourage individuals from across the multiple equality strands to increase their participation in democratic and civil society. The majority of Mentees had received information with regards to the scheme via their representative networks such as Stonewall Cymru and Women Making a Difference. The Mentee focus group felt this demonstrated the importance of being linked into social, equality and political networks in order to access schemes of this type. For one individual, it was a chance meeting with an Assembly Member who had expressed an interest in becoming a Mentor, who encouraged them to apply to become a Mentee.

In future, the group felt greater consideration should be given to finding ways of including the most marginalised individuals in society, ie those who sit outside of the traditional networks. The group felt that more involvement of the third sector in promoting the programme could have been of value. The partners' focus group also identified the need to expand the scheme's contact list and utilise additional forms of advertising in future schemes. This group also suggested that the recruitment period should be increased from six weeks to twelve weeks to increase the accessibility of the scheme.

Application forms

Overall there was a general level of satisfaction with the selection process for the scheme. The Mentees' focus group felt that the application form and supporting information was clear and easily understood. It explained the purpose of the scheme and the expectations of Mentees. As one participant commented "we got what we went in for and more." However, following the launch of the recruitment phase of the scheme several applicants approached the Scheme Coordinator expressing concerns about having to complete a written form – in four cases the Scheme Coordinator transcribed applications through telephone calls or face-to-face meetings. The partners' focus group suggested that consideration could be given to a less formal application process.

Assessment centres

The assessment sessions were organised regionally across Wales in accessible venues. This was felt to be an essential element and was warmly appreciated. The sessions were considered to be structured in an informal way enabling individuals to feel relaxed and get to know each other. "I realised people felt the same way as I did (nervous) this was very reassuring." The group work broke down barriers between individuals and gave a shared sense of purpose. "The interview process? Well, I didn't realise that it was an interview!" Some participants commented that it had attracted a diverse group of individuals which "made you think I am going to learn something new here."

A number of individuals however, felt that there could have been more dates for the assessment and that there could have been greater geographical flexibility.

"It is important that disabled people in a number of locations in Wales have been able to participate in the scheme and have since thought about having more involvement in Welsh political life."

Steering Group member

"I previously lost heart in a career in politics as I felt that my sexuality would count against me. However, sitting in this large room filled with people of all sorts of different backgrounds made me realise that I can achieve whatever I want to."

Mentee

"I think it had a positive impact for lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Wales. It was a good start, to hopefully continued promotion of better political and civic representation to all people in Wales."

Steering Group member



Dancers from India Dance Wales at the close of Step Up Cymru



Constantino Dumangane, Mentee

Pairing process

Of the 36 Mentees, one withdrew from the scheme before the launch event and it was not possible to find an appropriate Mentor for another, which resulted in 34 Mentees taking part in the scheme. Twenty Mentees were paired with local councillors and 14 with Assembly Members.

The partners' focus group identified that when pairing a Mentor with a Mentee, more emphasis could have been given to personality, lifestyle and caring commitments but it was agreed that it was important to have an understanding of an individual's political opinions in addition to party affiliation.

The expectation from most Mentees was to be paired with an Assembly Member and several expressed disappointment when they received a local councillor. However that feeling of disappointment did not last with one Mentee commenting "at the start of the process I had not thought about shadowing a local councillor and was somewhat disappointed especially when my Mentor was unable to attend the celebration launch. However, this was short-lived ... I believe we shared the same desire to make a difference to our city and the people within."

The geographical element of the pairing process was accommodated in the majority of cases. Only six participants were paired with a Mentor who did not represent them, with one commenting, "at first I had misgivings about being a Mentee out of my own area. Having spent time considering the situation, it allowed me a more objective view on the processes involved in local government."

The partners' focus group also suggested that learning preferences could be considered for each participant for any future scheme as they could highlight the desirability of pairing according to similarities in learning styles, where possible – and highlight the potential difficulties in mis-pairing. Those present acknowledged that the different learning styles of individuals are likely to affect the mentoring relationship and where possible the Mentor and Mentee should share common or complimentary learning styles. Personal awareness of learning styles would also be of benefit.

"The scheme has helped my Mentee get an insight into a world that she felt she never would. She met a lot of people from all walks of life and I could see that she gained so much in confidence from being part of the scheme."

Mentor

"I was pleased to feel sufficiently confident to make conversation with a group of people I hadn't previously spent much time with, and to spend the day out of my 'comfort zone' being in unfamiliar surroundings."

Mentee

Mentees/Mentors

Some Mentees entered the programme with little or no knowledge of Welsh politics and were involved to build personal confidence and understanding. There were a significant number who were already knowledgeable and ambitious but were being blocked from developing because of numerous social and economic barriers.

Although many Mentors enjoyed their experiences overall, several expressed a desire for Mentees to have more commitment to the scheme with five Mentors saying their Mentee failed to turn up to several meetings; one Mentor, when asked what could have been done differently to support them, suggested “a clear induction for participating councillors as well as Mentees. It delayed establishing with the Mentee exactly what was expected during the programme until several weeks into the programme.”

Several Mentors commented that Mentees were not as committed as they could be and suggested that “it needs to be much more structured and more obligation on the Mentee to carry out the work experience in question.” Conversely, one Mentee commented that “I only had two meetings with my Mentor. I would love to be able to do again with a Mentor who had more time,” whilst another identified the need for “more structure as the project was quite a free plan. A lot was left upon Mentees to do and not enough information on what to do; this can be quite scary if [one is] lacking in experience.”

One local councillor Mentor suggested “I think it would have been good to get the Mentors in for a session with the Mentees and to have a discussion about what is expected from the relationship, a contract if you like. It is hard to pressure a Mentee when you don’t know the boundaries. I think a session on what the minimum expectation should be would really help.”

It was acknowledged by the majority of the Mentee’s focus group that their Mentors understood the mentoring role in accordance with the stated definition; however one individual felt that the definition of ‘Mentor’ used for this scheme was inaccurate as they felt it was more of a role -shadowing scheme. It was generally felt that it would have been useful for Mentors to have a set of competencies to enable them to undertake the role to the highest possible standard. Assumptions should not be made “that just because they are Assembly Members or councillors they know how to do it (mentoring).” One participant stated “Mentors should be very clear on the role and responsibilities of effectively mentoring someone.” Some individuals felt that some Mentors took a tick box approach and had not fully invested in the mentoring experience, with one suggesting that “the importance should be attached to being a Mentor because you want to, not because of political expediency.” However, for the most part, (with the exception of one Mentee at the focus group), the mentoring relationship worked well. Two of the focus group members felt that their mentoring relationship was excellent.

Feedback from Mentors identified that several required additional structure and further training for them to carry out their role. One councillor Mentor requested training to ensure he understood his role “to better support the Mentee,” whilst another felt “there was no structure in our meetings together and therefore they were too ad hoc – I would have set dates and times to meet Mentees.”

Experiences

Feedback from Mentors and the Mentees’ focus group suggested that for the most part the mentoring relationships worked well. One councillor commented “as far as my mentoring went it was a positive experience, I think both my Mentee and I learned from each other; he has a better understanding of a councillor’s life and I have a better understanding of his.”

The Mentees’ focus group identified that the most successful relationships were those where learning was a two way process – this view was supported by one of the Mentors who commented “I feel the scheme works well – it requires commitment, energy and time from both Mentees and Mentors in order for it to be successful. However the rewards are not only in improved Mentee experience and education, but also an enriching experience for Mentors as well – long may it continue.” Supporting this view, another Mentor said “the mentoring scheme is a two-way educational process – I have learnt a lot from those I have mentored and I think they have also learnt from the experience. It’s a very valuable and practical way to help people do something with their politics – and hopefully the people who have been mentored now have a much better idea as to how they themselves can effect change.”

A number of participants spoke of their increased understanding of the challenges facing Assembly Members and councillors. One Mentee reported that “my Mentor spoke about their experiences, family background; I understood the person behind the name.”

It was interesting to note that there were differences in experiences. While the majority of participants felt that the experience had been a positive one, there were examples at each end of the satisfaction scale. One Mentee felt totally dismissed by their Mentor.

Some Mentees bonded with their Mentors more than others. The experience was enhanced when the Mentor was proactive about finding out what the Mentee wanted to get out of the programme. Key to the experience was the energy and commitment shown by the Mentor where there was a structure agreed between Mentors and Mentees in terms of outcomes and experiences. One Mentee commenting on his Mentor said “she has been amazing, extremely tolerant of my ignorance and my many questions. She has made time for me in her busy schedule and she has made sure that I got to see as much of the Assembly’s work as possible from committee meetings to visits to her constituency.” Another Mentee said that their Mentor was “welcoming, understanding and above all interested.”

Learning and development

During the Mentees' focus group, participants agreed that the training had been of real benefit to the scheme with 45% of those responding to the post-scheme questionnaire stating that training was the most enjoyable part of the programme. Twelve sessions were offered in response to on-going feedback from Mentees. At the end of the scheme, one of the Mentees commented that "the training was excellent, particularly the media training. It was a wide and varied learning experience."

Further feedback from Mentees suggests greater variation in times and locations would be appreciated as well as one session offered on two occasions. The partners' focus group identified that more sessions should be offered outside of Cardiff, but organisers should be mindful that consideration needs to be made of possible attendance at different locations. It is worth noting, however, that a number of training sessions that were arranged outside of Cardiff had to be cancelled due to poor levels of interest. The focus group also considered that future schemes could have a number of core training sessions scheduled from the beginning with other reactive topics organised as the scheme progresses.

Participants particularly valued the opportunity to meet and share experiences with other Mentees. The training events provided the settings for this to happen. For some the scheme increased their networks "I was able to use the fact that I was on this scheme to get to speak to people; I would not have done that before". The scheme catered for people on different stages of their journey and recognised that everyone was starting from a different point. Some participants had more experience than others in the political sphere. However, as one participant stated, "do not assume that lots of experience means that this scheme won't be useful to you." A number of participants felt that it would have added to the scheme if Mentees could have met more often. It was suggested that "it was a missed opportunity for cross-fertilisation". Participants felt that the Scheme Coordinator's newsletter was helpful in keeping participants informed. It also acted as a conduit, connecting Mentees to the bigger picture of the scheme. A number of participants felt the website to be a useful information tool.

Conclusion

The scheme has been a positive sign that there is a pool of talent and potential available across different communities across Wales. This in turn builds confidence and fosters a culture which values different insights and views of the world. The importance of this must not be under-estimated; by creating more inclusion and diversity across civil society policies and public services are more likely to meet the needs of all communities and draw on the talents of the wider population.

The overarching question to be answered in concluding this report is: has the Step Up Cymru scheme achieved its aim to increase the knowledge and confidence of Mentees and to provide participants with the opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge to act as Community Ambassadors, advising and empowering others to become more actively engaged in civil society? This is a difficult question to answer because success can be measured in so many different ways. This report has sought to evaluate the Step Up Cymru scheme with a view to making recommendations as a result. At this stage, evaluation can only be measured in terms of how the participants have initially responded, whether their knowledge, skills and understanding have been increased as a result of taking part in the scheme and if any behavioural change has been incurred. To consider the longer term impact would require further research to investigate the increase in civic participation and consider the return on investment.

Did the participants, both Mentors and Mentees however, learn from their experiences? Has, or will civic participation increase as a result of the scheme? The findings of the evaluation would indicate that on the whole learning has taken place and civic participation will increase. There is no doubt from the responses that there has been a profound increase in the knowledge of the political/ democratic system in Wales and levels of confidence are far greater in the Assembly and local government among those that took part in the scheme. Are the participants better off than they would have been without it? For the majority, this is without doubt, an emphatic 'yes'.

"I think the mix of training and mentoring has made me much more aware of the opportunities that my community group can take to influence policy for the benefit of my community."

Mentee

"I came into this scheme with minimal knowledge of the political process. I came away from the scheme with a vast amount of knowledge, which now enables me to make choices and decisions relating to politics in a way I would never have thought before."

Mentee



Diana Ellis, Mentee



Cllr. Meryl Gravell, WLGA Presiding Officer and Mentor

Recommendations

General

01_ Before considering funding a future scheme, a further evaluation should be undertaken approximately 12 months after the close of the Step Up Cymru scheme to explore the longer term impact and to consider the return on investment.

02_ The timing of any future scheme should take into account availability of funding and local government, Assembly and UK election cycles. Newly elected members would need time to acclimatise to their new roles before taking on the role of Mentor.

03_ An understanding should be reached by those responsible for any future scheme in relation to the difference between mentoring and shadowing, and clarity should be explored to ensure that everyone involved in the scheme is aware of what is required ie mentoring, shadowing, or a blended approach to both.

Scheme promotion

04_ Distribution of marketing materials for the scheme needs to be wider to contact harder to reach individuals or those who currently have little interaction with existing networks and organisations to encourage them to apply – for example, doctors surgeries, housing offices, colleges, Big Issue, Job Centres etc.

Recruitment

05_ The recruitment window should be extended to twelve weeks – this would make the scheme more accessible.

06_ Simplify the existing application process and be prepared to make reasonable adjustments as necessary.

07_ Communicate clearly to applicants the purpose of the assessment centres.

08_ More assessment sessions could be delivered across Wales subject to an increased number of applicants.

09_ Guidance for Mentees and Mentors should be provided as early as possible to ensure that the time commitment for the scheme is fully understood.

10_ More work needs to be undertaken with Mentors such as developing a Mentor profile or role description.

11_ Offer induction training to both Mentors and Mentees, as well as the guidance document. This this would ensure that all individuals are fully aware of their role and the commitment needed to be involved in the scheme.

Pairing

12_ The pairing process needs to consider similarity in work and/or caring commitments.

13_ Develop a policy for dealing with problem cases, including potentially terminating relationships where necessary – a 'no-fault' divorce clause. This should be set out for Mentors and Mentees in the initial contract in terms of the relationship.

14_ All participants would benefit from undertaking an exercise on learning styles.

Learning and development

15_ A learning and development strategy and supporting comprehensive training plan should be developed for both Mentors and Mentees before the scheme is launched.

Project management

16_ Regular meetings should be scheduled between the partnership and Steering Group to update regarding the progression of the scheme.

17_ The Scheme Coordinator's time needs to be balanced between office-based activities and field activities to monitor the developing relationships between Mentors and Mentees.

Evaluation

18_ The scheme's processes should be evaluated independently to remove any potential bias and to ensure the evaluation is robust and credible.

Appendix 01

Steering Group's Terms of Reference and Membership

01_Purpose/objective of the Steering Group

The Steering Group is established for the purpose of:

- assisting with the development and promotion of the scheme;
- advising on best practice as required;
- assisting in the evaluation of the pilot scheme; and
- receiving on-going reports from the Scheme Coordinator.

02_Timescale

The Steering Group will operate from summer 2009 until the completion of the scheme in April 2010.

While a lot of work will be executed electronically, the Scheme Coordinator based at the National Assembly for Wales may periodically call meetings of the Steering Group.

03_Membership

The Steering Group will consist of one representative from each of the following organisations:

- Operation Black Vote;
- All Wales Ethnic Minority Association (AWEMA);
- Funky Dragon;
- Stonewall Cymru;
- Wales Women's National Coalition / Women Making a Difference;
- Disability Wales;
- Transgender Wales;
- Interfaith Council for Wales;
- National Assembly for Wales;
- Welsh Assembly Government;
- Welsh Local Government Association;
- Equality and Human Rights Commission Wales.

04_Requirements

Members of the Steering Group are invited to:

- advise on the guidance for Mentors and Mentees;
- advise on the design of, and contribute to, the selection process; and
- cascade the advertising literature for potential Mentees to their existing contacts.

05_Providing continued support to participants

Each organisation on the Steering Group is invited to:

- provide advice and support to participants; and
- continue to work with the Scheme Coordinator and the Equality and Access team in the National Assembly for Wales to ensure that issues of best practice are followed.

06_Remuneration

Travel costs for Steering Group meetings will be reimbursed with valid receipts.

Appendix 02

Applicants' equality characteristics

	Applications	Short listed	Successful Mentees
Total	79	58	36*
Women	54	40	27
Men	24	15	9
Transgender	1	1	0
Disabled people	40	24	12
BME people	21	16	14
LGB people	7	5	3
Under 25	8	6	5
Over 55	19	12	6

*34 Mentees commenced the scheme

Mentors' political affiliation

Assembly Members

Party	No. of Mentors
Welsh Liberal Democrats	1
Welsh Labour	5
Welsh Conservatives	3
Plaid Cymru	5

Councillors

Party	No. of Mentors
Welsh Liberal Democrats	6
Welsh Labour	6
Welsh Conservatives	1
Plaid Cymru	3
Independent	3
Minority Independent	1

Appendix 03

Initial learning and development plan

Event	Provider
Introduction to Welsh politics	Voices for Change Cymru (Wales Council for Voluntary Action)
Introduction to local government and health	Voices for Change Cymru (Wales Council for Voluntary Action)
Positive representation	Scheme Coordinator and Project Partner
Finding your voice – A workshop on active citizenship	Scheme Coordinator and Project Partner
Illuminating the corridors of power	Operation Black Vote
Media awareness	Quadrant Media Training Ltd

“Since joining the scheme I have had increasing numbers of community members come to me with the expectation that I can find information and act as a mediator with public bodies.”

Mentee

“I’m not sure my Mentor knew much about the scheme or the purpose of it at the beginning – maybe he could have been given a little more ground knowledge at the start.”

Mentee “

“Chatting to my Mentee was useful in enabling me to better understand the barriers facing under-represented groups – hearing first hand is always powerful.”

Mentor

Appendix 04 – Acknowledgments

The scheme was made possible through the collaborative work and funding from the National Assembly for Wales, Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association. The partners designed, developed and administered the scheme and are grateful for the work of the Scheme Coordinator and to members of the Steering Group who provided support and guidance.

Ultimately, the success of the scheme is due to the time and commitment of the Mentors and Mentees who participated.



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