

Mid Wales Regional Committee Mid 03-02 (p3)

Date 17 May 2002

Time 10.30 - 1.30pm

Venue Neuadd Pendre, Tywyn

Coleg Harlech

Further Education, Lifelong Learning and Training

1. Background

Coleg Harlech WEA (North) is a specialist provider of adult education aiming to attract learners who have failed to take full advantage of education in the past. The Association's provision extends from Holyhead to Wrexham down to Newtown. This covers two ELWa regions and six CCETs. The Association is an educational charity described in the F/HE Act as a designated institution for the purposes of funding from the National Council of ELWa. Coleg Harlech and the Workers' Educational Association (North Wales) merged in August 2001. Coleg Harlech is the only adult residential college in Wales and has close links with the other residential colleges in the UK like Ruskin and Northern College.

2. Provision

CHWEA(N)'s provision is diverse but the examples below offer an overview of its main programmes:

Community programmes

New Directions – a return to learning programme comprising core units in communications, numeracy and IT and additional modules covering a range of subjects including art, media, assertiveness and confidence building, Welsh, history, psychology, creative writing, lip reading, deaf awareness, training the trainers, children playing – adults learning and Welsh for Parents. IT programmes are offered at different levels in a number of locations.

Liberal Arts Programmes

A range of courses including current affairs, local history, art appreciation, languages, poetry, creative writing, visual art, creating and performing, music appreciation and nature and the environment.

Residential Provision

Full-time University of Wales Diploma in the Performing Arts, Social Studies and Information Technology and a range of short courses in a number of areas including Welsh, Welsh Literature, Media, IT and the creative and visual arts.

3. Collaboration

CHWEA(N) is involved in a number of collaborative projects. For example:

1. Peripatetic Outreach Programme in the Community

Aims: To target isolated rural communities and provide supportive and coherent pathways of learning for vulnerable people.

Supported by ESF.

Partners: Coleg Menai, Coleg Llandrillo, Careers Wales

2. Sgiliau

Aims: To promote the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in small and medium sized enterprises, sole traders and micro businesses in rural areas.

Supported by ESF.

Partners: Coleg Meirion Dwyfor, Coleg Menai, Coleg Llandrillo, university of Wales, WISS Ltd and Amigo Computers.

3. Credit Union Training Programme

These projects promote lifelong learning in the voluntary sector and the community. The main focus is combating social exclusion by encouraging investment in social capital enterprises such as the Credit Unions. The projects are multi layered, offering a varied programme to paid workers and volunteers. CHWEA provides a range of engagement and progression programmes in the community based on New Directions that attract local people into learning and offer advice and guidance on careers and opportunities for

working in the voluntary sector.

Partners: Wales Co-operative, CHWEA, WEA South, University of Wales.

4. Wales Union Learning Fund Projects

Projects to promote lifelong learning in the workplace using the workplace as a place of learning for the delivery of a range of programmes including the visual arts, New Directions, confidence building and assertiveness training, creative writing and IT. The model for promoting partnerships between employers, unions and Coleg Harlech WEA (North) was first developed in Anglesey Aluminium and the MEM factory in Holyhead. The MEM project has been identified in a review of WULF funding as an exemplary model for engaging learners in the workplace and the art work produced by the students has been used to promote WULF. The experience has enabled CHWEA(N) to develop other links with employers by promoting the success of the MEM project.

5. Work with Unison

A unique collaboration between the WEA in the UK and Unison has provided opportunities for CHWEA(N) in north and mid Wales to deliver a wide range of programmes for Unison members in the workplace. These include general education programmes such as return to learn and more specific courses for stewards covering subjects such as health and safety. There are plans to pilot an Open College Citizenship Award.

6. Voluntary Sector

Provision in the voluntary sector in partnership with the County Voluntary Councils in north and mid-Wales. ELWa commissioned CHWEA to carry out a Training Needs Analysis with 200 voluntary groups in the region and the findings will form the basis for developing a more cohesive curriculum offer for the sector. The voluntary skills programme concentrates on the generic skills needed to participate and run voluntary groups or organisations. The provision is offered in a flexible manner to meet the needs of the sector and a strong emphasis is placed on working in appropriate and accessible venues that draw people together from a very wide range of voluntary groups.

Policy Issues

It is clear from the examples above that Coleg Harlech WEA (N) has responded positively to the Assembly's agenda to widen participation into learning. The Association attracts learners from a cross section of the population and offers unique opportunities for adults to access education in remote and isolated rural communities and in areas of economic and social

disadvantage. The residential facility at Harlech is offered to learners who have experienced very long periods of unemployment and the provision is structured around the need to build their confidence and self esteem. The College is particularly successful in attracting men who have found themselves isolated due to alcohol and drug problems. In terms of widening participation both Coleg Harlech and the Workers' Educational Association have long been established as organisations offering 'second chance' education and the merger has helped secure the future of this provision in Wales. In this respect the Association has a great deal of experience and expertise to offer in meeting the priorities set out by the Assembly to increase the demand for lifelong learning.

In looking to the future CHWEA(N) does have some concerns about the definition of lifelong learning that is used in some policy documents. ELWa's corporate plan identifies 'creating lifelong learners' as a key goal but then goes on to describe the means to achieve this in terms of developing 'new demand driven mechanisms to engage individuals in lifelong learning, building upon the experience of Individual Learning Accounts, but targeted on meeting economic needs'. The performance measures and targets that then support this goal are expressed in relation to the achievement of qualifications. The Association's experience of working with adult learners suggests that the process is more complex than this and that education for qualifications is only one part of the mix of provision that should be offered to ensure that the needs of learners are met at all stages of their lives.

The importance of offering non-accredited learning is often overlooked and the role of the liberal arts in providing opportunities for people to extend their learning in a whole range of subject areas that may not be related to qualifications appears to be undervalued. CHWEA(N) seeks to provide for the diverse needs of learners by offering learning that is sensitive, appropriate and sustainable at all stages of the individual's life.

If the success of lifelong learning measures is to be judged by the acquisition of qualifications there is a danger that some learning programmes will fall outside what is considered to be eligible for funding by ELWa. A considerable percentage of CHWEA(N)'s provision would fall into this category and this is clearly a cause for concern for the future success of the Association. There are also questions to be asked about the appropriateness of using performance indicators to measure the success of non-accredited or informal learning. Crude performance indicators will fail to pick up the subtle factors that influence the decisions taken by adult learners about whether qualifications are appropriate or not. A broader definition of lifelong learning is necessary to ensure that all learning is valued and that entry points into learning are diverse and sensitive to the complex needs of adult learners at different stages of their lives as carers, wage earners and non-wage earners. The provision on offer needs to be funded at all levels to ensure that quality standards are met and that programmes are structured in ways that enhance the life chances of individuals through a variety of learning experiences.