

Adult Learners' Week 2025 - Briefing for Senedd Members

Adult Learners' Week is 15-21 September 2025. This briefing underlines the importance of adult learning in Wales, and calls for the next Welsh Government to ensure that adult learning can continue to help communities thrive in Wales.

Introduction

Adult learning and upskilling are a key part of the rebuilding the Welsh economy, as well as preparing for the changing nature of work, for example, the need for more green skills and the rise in artificial intelligence (AI).

Lifelong learning provides a sense of wellbeing and purpose, helping to address social issues such as loneliness and isolation. These benefits in turn provide communities with the tools to thrive. Skills help people into work and to improve at work, which allows us all to keep up with a changing world and our rapidly transforming workplaces.

However, participation in lifelong learning has fallen over the last decade in Wales with large inequalities in access to learning by age, socioeconomic group, and prior educational attainment.

The reason for this big drop was a large reduction in funding in 2013, not a drop in need or demand. Funding for adult community learning was reduced by 37.5%, while budgets for part-time further education was cut by 33%.

(Source: Learning and Work Institute. [Barriers to learning | Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023](#))

Chart 2f: Learners in adult learning, 2012/13 to 2021/22 [note 1]



Adult Community Learning is essential for those individuals who have been under-served, and furthest away from education and employment.

As funding pressures intensify, we must avoid a narrowing of the curriculum offer. The closure or reduction of provision will have negative consequences on health and other services.

Fees and funding to cover living costs are also major concerns for learners. It is often the lack of maintenance funding, and the need to continue working, that act as barriers to pursuing further and higher education.

Senedd election calls on Adult Learning

The Senedd election 2026 is an opportunity to refocus on adult learning, and the opportunities for part-time and adult education to be expanded towards addressing the shortage of basic skills, alongside investment in new opportunities for shorter, flexible courses to support reskilling, upskilling and employability.

To ensure that adult learning can continue to help communities thrive in Wales, the next Welsh Government, working with Medr, should:

- 1) **Commit to deliver a new entitlement to lifelong learning** for every adult in Wales. This should be a long-term policy goal that starts with reversing cuts to adult education, introducing new funding lines to allow colleges to provide rapid and flexible reskilling and upskilling and that ultimately allows individuals to access a personalised, flexible learning fund that they can access throughout their lives.
- 2) **Invest in rolling out Recognition of Prior Learning** to support adults with the fewest qualifications to gain recognition for the skills they have. This will help fast-track learners to achieving recognised qualifications and provide them with the opportunity to gain higher-skilled, higher-wage jobs. Scotland has made significant investment and commitment to RPL¹, and it is recognised as a useful tool not just by the education sector, but also by a range of stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Defence, NHS Scotland, and wider employers.
- 3) **Recognise the opportunities and challenges from the development of AI** by working with colleges to ensure every adult who wants it the access to learning they need to understand the basics of using AI. Colleges should be funded and supported by both the next Welsh Government and by Medr to be the frontline provider of foundational AI learning, to be a part of the pathway into AI careers and to support employers to upskill their workforces.

Join the ColegauCymru manifesto launch on 8 October 2025 at 10.30am.

Click [HERE](#) for the link to teams.

Meeting ID: 375 235 745 169 0

Passcode: Lc3uj9Q4

Case Study: Overcoming barriers to Adult Learning

With unwavering determination and the support of Adult Learning Wales' (ALW) dedicated Flexible Essential Skills team and the ALW quality team, North Wales-based learner Sinead Tia Barry-Blackham has not only navigated but triumphed over significant personal barriers on her learning journey. Her story is a testament to perseverance and the power of tailored support.



¹ <https://www.colleges.wales/en/blog/post/learning-from-scotland-on-recognising-prior-learning>

Sinead suffers from extreme Social Anxiety, which presented considerable hurdles with her studies. In her Essential Skills Wales Level 2 Communication controlled tasks she had to wear sunglasses during the discussion and presentation elements due to a severe twitch in her eye, which occurred when she was anxious.

Before each exam, Sinead would talk to Catrin Roberts, a Quality Assurance Administrator and an exam invigilator with ALW. Catrin invigilated Sinead on a 1:1 basis in a safe space as she couldn't be in a room with the other learners due to her anxieties. Over the course of Sinead's exams, the pair would talk about the difficulties Sinead has faced in life and personal problems that are still ongoing in her life.

The growth in Sinead's confidence has increased her employment opportunities. Sinead now has a part-time job at her local TK Maxx, where she works in a customer service position, which requires interaction with customers. Catrin said: *"This is something I could never imagine when I met Sinead back in February, where she couldn't even make eye contact with me. Her gaining confidence and dealing with her anxieties has been an incredible achievement."*

It is time for Wales to acknowledge the transformative power of adult learning – its role in tackling poverty and inequality, and contributing to overall well-being and a sense of purpose. Wales has an opportunity now to create a robust system that offers greater opportunities for lifelong learning, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and skilled society in Wales – for today's and future generations.

How you can support Adult Learners' Week - 15-21 September 2025

Record and share a short video on your social media platforms, highlighting the importance of adult learning. By equipping individuals with essential skills, fostering confidence, and providing crucial support networks, adult learning programmes are not only empowering individuals and families but also contributing to a more skilled workforce, a stronger local economy, and a more equitable and sustainable future for all communities in Wales.

Share what's going on at your local college - use the hashtags #NeverStopLearning and #AdultLearnersWeek, and remember to tag ColegauCymru on [LinkedIn](#) and [BlueSky](#).

If you would like to arrange a college visit in your constituency or region, or would like further information, please contact ColegauCymru Policy Officer, Amy Williams:

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