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Short Review of recent Adult Learning Policy in Wales

This paper contains key statistics on adult learning, recent political developments, key themes and my evaluation of those key themes in recent adult learning policy in Wales.

Emerging issues appear to me to be:

- Increasing opportunities for specifically Welsh education policy;
- Challenges and opportunities (for a change in direction, for judicious lobbying) that come with a new coalition government;
- Increasing importance of Welsh-medium provision (both Welsh-medium education and Welsh for Adults);
- Increasing collaboration between providers (adult/community education, FE and HE), importance of learning networks;
- Increasing attempts to link economic development, housing, health and other issues with education and thus to create 'joined-up policy'. This aim is connected to the goal of influencing social inclusion and economic development through widening participation at all study levels;
- Policy developments work towards raising 'basic skills' levels as well as higher level skills for professional as well as academic development;
- Attempts to make learning at all levels part of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales;
- Creating a coherent e-learning policy for Wales.

Future challenges appear to me to be mainly in the following areas:

- Increasing opportunities for Welsh-medium education, especially in vocational settings;
- Adequate (financial) support for those who earn just enough to *not* qualify for existing support mechanisms and/or for those seeking higher-level qualifications;
- Increasing the value and quality of work-place learning and ensure employer-support;
- Problems of competition between providers despite the Assembly's aim to create one learning framework;
- Many adult learning providers are dependent on short-term funding, especially on European Funding. It is unclear what will happen especially to community provision (Learning Networks etc.) once European Funding is used up;
- Problems of Welsh geography (lack of transport links; the majority of learning opportunities are available in the urban areas; problems in the coordination of adult learning provision as well as bringing together organisers/providers through organisations such as the Universities' Association of Lifelong Learning) are still not overcome;
- Lack of meaningful and reasonably secure career structures for adult educators;
- Creating a coherent e-learning policy for Wales.

1. Key statistics

Adults in FE, LEA Community Learning and Work-based Learning¹

- In 2005/06, 79% of learners in FE, LEA Community Learning or Work-based Learning were over 19 years of age and 64% were over 25 years of age;
- The number of women aged 20 or above was 62% higher than the number of men;
- 96% of learners whose ethnicity had been recorded were white (this figure includes young students);
- 8% of those whose disability status was known, were recorded as having a disability (this figure includes young students);
- in FE
 - 20% of enrolments (for which the age was known) on full-time learning programmes were aged 20 or above; only 1% were 50 or over;
 - 85% of part-time enrolments were 20 or over; 24% were 50 or over;
 - enrolments have increased by 25%; the 2004/05 Estyn report found that FE Colleges were successful “in trying to attract more adults and under-represented groups into education and training” (p. 10).
- in Work-based Learning
 - 6% were aged over 50;
 - the 2004/05 Estyn² report found that “the quality of training is a little better than last year. However, providers still have a lot to do before work-based learning in Wales is good enough” (p.1). Standards are of concern: only 14% of providers inspected are good with outstanding features/no important shortcomings; 28% of providers have shortcomings in important areas/many shortcomings; standards vary between providers;
 - Work-based learning providers are increasingly expected to provide basic skills, and some providers find this difficult. Only about 1/3 of learners in the providers inspected achieved the basic skills they need for their qualification. Anecdotally, the difficulty for providers is increased because learners have little motivation for basic skills. Further, few employers are interested in their employees achieving all parts of a qualification;
 - The Estyn inspection further found that “[p]oor basic literacy and numeracy skills are the main barriers for adults and young people on work-based learning schemes” (p.3; see also *The Learning Country: Vision into Action*).
- in LEA Community Learning
 - almost all the provision was part-time in various venues in the community;
 - just over half of enrolments were of learners aged 50 or over;
 - the Estyn report found that standards are high in the majority of classes;
 - “[a]dult learners achieve well in basic skills on community-based courses. Learners achieve more when basic skills are mixed in with their courses and they use their basic skills in practical activities. Many learners go on to further study” (Estyn, p. 1);

¹ Sources: “Further Education, Work-based Learning and Community Learning in Wales, 2005/06”, Paper SDR53/2007. Cardiff: DELLS, 2007; *Estyn Annual Report 2004/05: Work-based Learning Providers*; *Estyn Annual Report 2004/05: Adult and Community Learning*; *Estyn Annual Report 2004/05: FE Colleges*.

² See Annex B for a key to abbreviations etc.

- there are few opportunities for Welsh-medium learning (except in specially designated Welsh for Adults classes).

(See Table 1 in Annex A)

Adults in Higher Education³

- Wales has a relatively high number of mature, part-time students;
- At all study levels, the part-time mode is dominated by adult students;
- At *postgraduate* level, 51% of male full-time students and 44% of female full-time students are over 25 years of age; by contrast, 90% of male part-time students and 89% of female part-time students are over 25 years of age;
- At *first degree* level, 12% of all male full-time students and 15% of all female full-time students are above 25 years of age; by contrast, 81% of all male part-time students and 87% of all female part-time students are over 25 years of age. The percentages conceal the relatively low number of part-time students at first degree level, however;
- At *other undergraduate* level, 22% of all male full-time students and 35% of all female full-time students are over 25 years of age; but 60% of all male part-time students and 69% of all female part-time students are over 25 years of age. Much higher numbers of part-time students are enrolled at other postgraduate level than at the other levels.

(See Tables 2-4 in Annex A)

Selected results of the survey on adult participation in Wales conducted by NIACE Dysgu Cymru⁴

- The numbers of adult learners who are currently participating in learning and/or who have had recent learning episodes has continuously risen from 39% in 2002, 42% in 2003 to 43% in 2007. However, the number of adults who are currently participating in learning has fallen slightly (2002: 20%; 2003: 22%; 2007: 18%); conversely, since 2002 there has been a continuous decline in the proportion of adults who say that they have not engaged in learning since leaving school (2002: 39%; 2003: 32%; 2007: 30%);
- Men and women are equally likely to be participating in learning (43%). Men are more likely to be current learners than women (men: 19%; women: 17%). The proportion of men who have not participated since leaving full-time education has remained constant at 30% while the same proportion for women has decreased from 33% in 2002 to 31% in 2007;
- Socio-economic class is a key determinant of adult participation of learning. Adults in the highest socio-economic groups (AB) are more than twice as likely to be learning as those in groups DE. In addition, 50% of DEs have not participated in learning since leaving full-time education, compared with 10% of ABs. The gap in participation between socio-economic classes has widened since 2003 with more adults in classes ABC1 (+5%) and fewer adults in classes C2DE (-1%) participating in learning;
- The proportion of adults who have done no further learning since leaving full-time education has decreased in socio-economic classes AB (from 17% in 2003 to 10% in 2007) and C1 (from 20% to 17%) while it has increased in classes C2 (from 28% to 30%) and DE (from 49% to 50%);
- Participation in learning declines with increasing age: in 2007, 70% (+2% since 2003) of 17-14 year olds reported episodes of current or recent learning, 48%

³ Source: HEFCW, "Welsh Higher Education Statistics, 2004/05". Cardiff: HEFCW, 2007.

⁴ Source: Aldrige, F., Furlong, C. & Nettleship, S. (2007). *Wales: Moving towards the Learning Country*. Cardiff: WAG.

(-2% since 2003) of 25-44 year olds, 44% (+4% since 2003) of 45-64 year olds and 14% (-2% since 2003) of 65+ year olds. Future intentions to learn also decline with age;

- Those in employment (57% full-time employment & 55% part-time employment) are much more likely be participating in learning than those outside the workforce (39% of unemployed adults; 24% of those who are not working and 20% of retired people).

For further results, see Annex A. See also Table 5: Proportion of adults without qualifications and adults with higher-level qualifications by unitary authority in Annex A.

2. Short review of Welsh adult education/lifelong learning policy⁵

2.1 Recent legislative developments and their impact on adult education/lifelong learning

The Government of Wales Act (1998) provided for a National Assembly of Wales but made no provisions for primary legislative power. This has changed with the **Government of Wales Act (2006)**. It confers the ability of the National Assembly to make its own legislation on devolved matters such as education. However, the Assembly will need to obtain “legislative competence” on a case-by-case basis from the UK Parliament if it wants to introduce new laws. However, this means that there now exists a provision to make Wales-specific laws in education – a freedom that the Welsh Assembly is likely to make use of.⁶

2.2 Recent changes in the political landscape in Wales

The 2007 Assembly elections produced no clear winner, and, after difficult discussions, a coalition between Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru emerged. The two parties published *One Wales: a progressive agenda for the Government of Wales*⁷ on 27 June 2007. Chapter six is devoted to a discussion of “Learning for Life”. To my knowledge, this is the first strategy document that actually conceives of lifelong learning as encompassing the whole lifespan rather than as a more modern term for ‘adult (continuing) education’. Terminologically, this has two effects: all education and learning is discussed within one framework, and, theoretically at least, adult learning is on a par with young people’s learning. What remains unexplained is how ‘education’ (i.e. the framework) and ‘learning’ (i.e. the activity of learning) relate to the policy process. In other words, ‘Lifelong Education’ might have been a more fitting term for what is subsequently discussed in the chapter, but it has to be recognised that ‘Lifelong Learning’, as a term, has more political currency.

The text itself reveals that education for young people is likely to remain the main preoccupation of the next Assembly Government, the new Minister for Education, Jane Hutt, and the new Assembly Committee for Enterprise and Learning.⁸

⁵ The views expressed here are my own and do not reflect views of the Department of Adult Continuing Education or those of Swansea University.

⁶ For more information, see <http://www.new.wales.gov.uk/about/CALM/GOWAct2006/GoWA06Guide?lang=en>.

⁷ For the *One Wales* document, see http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/27_06_07_onewales.pdf.

⁸ This Committee has an all-party membership and its remit covers Economic Development and Regeneration; Social Enterprise; Transport; and Lifelong Learning. It remains to be seen whether issues affecting adult learners will be squeezed out as the Committee has little enough time to commit to education issues.

“Our vision is of a society in which learning throughout life is the norm, where the people of Wales are actively engaged in acquiring new knowledge and skills from childhood to old age. We will meet the challenge of improving the level of qualifications attained by our children, young people, *and adults too*. We will build upon our partnership with education providers, staff and parents to create the *best possible schools for the future*.” (p. 21, emphasis added)

The coalition’s ‘programme for government’ has five headings: establishing a right to learning, reforming funding, ensuring the best start for young children, creating 21st-century schools, and developing adult learning.

The ‘Right to Learning’ is only applied to adults within the context of a national Welsh-medium Education Strategy, which is “to develop effective provision from nursery through to further and higher education backed up by an implementation programme”. This includes the creation of a “Welsh-medium Higher Education Network – the Federal College - . . . to ensure Welsh-medium provision in our universities” and the “establishment of a Welsh for Adults Unit” (p. 22). Apart from that no mention is made of establishing a right for adults to learning either in a skills/training context or in a more liberal context. It is also doubtful whether establishing a ‘Federal College’ will have any real effect on the learning/teaching of/through Welsh in universities unless they can access specific funding streams.

The next priority, ‘Reforming Funding’, could have implications for adult learning provision: funding for schools and FE is to move to three-year funding cycles. Apart from that point, funding adult learning is not addressed in this section.

The section on ‘Developing Adult Learning’ encompasses FE and HE but does not mention community learning, LEA adult education provision or provision by voluntary or private training providers. In all essential points, this document takes forward the preoccupations of the last Assembly Government:

“We are resolved to develop a further and higher education system which offers a broad range of learning opportunities, is responsive to the needs of students and employers and tackles poverty and disadvantage. We are committed to widening participation in higher education. All educational institutions will be strongly encouraged to work together to make the most of their resources and provide the widest possible range of opportunities.” (p. 24)

In other words, it is a mixture of the economic and the social agenda, a concern with widening participation is highlighted and institutions are still ‘encouraged’ to take part in ‘reconfiguration and collaboration’. Several interesting points emerge: the coalition promises to “provide extra assistance with student debt and maintain existing fee levels in Wales up to and including 2009/10 [for Welsh-domiciled students]” (p. 24). This is reassuring but, nevertheless, financial assistance for adults, especially those who are on low incomes but who are not poor, remains limited. The Assembly Learning Grant (ALG) is available for full-time and some, ‘substantial’ part-time undergraduate students, but, part-time students, most of whom are adults, do not often take it up – perhaps because the grant is means-tested and is linked to study intensity.⁹ Following the recommendations of the Graham Review, this

⁹ Stroud et al (2004) show that, in the academic year 2002/03, 390 part-time HE students and 13,900 full-time HE students received an ALG. This is just 2.81% of the total and does not reflect the overall percentage of part-time undergraduate HE

Assembly Government will have to come up with solutions for financial help for part-time students at undergraduate as well as postgraduate level.

Widening participation is given some space but dealt with in a catch-all phrase, which might not be followed up by concrete measures. Nevertheless, the explicit mentioning of adult learners is a departure from previous strategies: “We will work to widen participation *for all ages* in further and higher education, promoting *adult and community learning* both in relation to employability and the wider benefits which education brings” (p. 24, emphases added). The terminological link between ‘adult’ and ‘community learning’ may mean, however, that adult learning is primarily perceived to be as low-level, low-intensity learning.

3. Previous strategy documents and research reports

Education Strategy:

- *The Learning Country* (2001);¹⁰
- *Reaching Higher: Higher Education and the Learning Country* (2002);
- *Skills and Employment Action Plan for Wales* (2005);
- *The Learning Country: Vision into Action* (2006).¹¹

Related strategy documents:

- *Cymru Ar-lein – Wales Online* (2001);
- *A Winning Wales: The National Economic Development Strategy of the Welsh Assembly Government* (2002). This economic strategy links in with *The Learning Country* stressing skills development, lifelong learning skills and tackling the ‘basic skills deficit’. In *A Winning Wales*, education is about “embedding a culture of self-confidence, initiative and the ability to adapt and learn”;
- *Wales: A Better Country. The Strategic Agenda of the Welsh Assembly Government* (2003);
- *People, Places, Futures: The Wales Spatial Plan* (2004): the Spatial Plan is an economic planning tool which “investigates the interaction of different policies and practice across regional space, and sets the role of places in a wider context” (p.3-4). In theory, it now underlies all planning in the related areas of the economy, housing, health, transport and education;
- *Iaith Pawb: A National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales* (2004);
- *Wales: A Vibrant Economy* (2005): is a follow-up document to *A Winning Wales*; stresses close links between education and economic performance but focuses on early years education and the 14-19 agenda, not adult education; reaffirms the importance of the *Wales Spatial Plan* as the central planning tool;
- *Wales for Innovation: the Welsh Assembly Government’s Action Plan for Innovation* (n.d.; ca. 2004/2005?): focuses on higher-level skills and knowledge, links with HEIs and FE Colleges, intellectual property and commercial exploitation of innovative research.

students. The Assembly and HEFCW have offered no explanation why part-time students are reluctant to apply. (Stroud, D. et al, 2005, *A Review of Research on Student Support Systems and Tuition Fee Regimes, with a special focus on Wales*. Cardiff: Cardiff University.)

¹⁰

http://www.elwa.ac.uk/doc_bin/SkillsObservatory/learning_country_paving_document.pdf.

¹¹

<http://www.niace.rcthosting.com/cms/news/downloaddoc.asp?DocRef=784&MediaFolder=news>.

Major initiatives:

- **Communities First:** after categorising Welsh postcode areas by means of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, the 100 'most deprived' communities were awarded "Communities First" status. Special funding is made available to education providers at all levels to engage with Communities First wards. Targets for other initiatives, such as *Reaching Wider*, are often tied to participation in Communities First Areas;¹²
- **Reaching Wider:** a HEFCW initiative, which aims to increase HE participation from groups and communities in Wales by raising aspirations and creating new study opportunities and learning pathways to HE. The initiative engages with four main groups of all ages, which are perceived to be under-represented in HE: people living in Communities First areas; people from black and minority ethnic communities; people wishing to study through the medium of Welsh and disabled people. *Reaching Wider* partnerships include local authorities, schools, the voluntary sector, Careers Wales, FE and HE. The evaluation of the *Reaching Wider* initiative conducted for HEFCW by Arad Consulting (2007)¹³ found that more effort needs to go into meeting the *all-age* remit of the initiative and it needs to ensure that adult learners, including those in employment, are more actively targeted. It was also found that there is a need for better tracking of progression routes for adult learners;¹⁴
- **Cymru Ar Lein - Wales Online:** themes for the Welsh ICT strategy: enhancing communities; building successful businesses; improving public services, developing ICT skills, and ensuring first-class infrastructure. Includes an e-learning strategy, which links up with the Welsh Assembly's basic skills and Lifelong Learning strategies. Adults are not specifically mentioned but included in lifelong learning measures. One of the objectives is to "create a national integrated e-learning network through which all learners can receive high quality advice and guidance, participate in lifelong learning (including workforce development), and experience seamless transition and progression". In other words, it is a virtual mirror image of the lifelong learning the CQFW (see below) is to underpin.

Major independent research reports:

- Rees, T. et al (2001). *Investing in Learners: Coherence, clarity and equity for student support in Wales*. Cardiff: Independent Investigation Group on Student Hardship and Funding in Wales. The first Assembly strategy, *The Learning Country*, was partly based on this report, which partly explains its focus on full-time students, as this report did not consider part-time students;
- Rees, T. et al (2005). *Fair and Flexible Funding: A Welsh Model to Promote Quality and Access in Higher Education*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government. This report made several important recommendations on the funding model for full-time first degree study at HE. In response, the WAG introduced the fees settlement for Wales (no 'top-up fees' and deferred payment options for Welsh-domiciled students) and support mechanisms such as the Assembly Learning Grant (for post-compulsory education including HE). The report

¹² see

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/regeneration/communitiesfirst/?lang=en>.

¹³ Arad Consulting (2007). *Evaluation of the widening access activities and the Reaching Wider Initiative in Welsh Higher Education Institutions*. Cardiff: HEFCW.

¹⁴ http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/Widening_Access/wider_initiative.htm.

also suggested that another Review Group be set up to look at part-time study (see Graham);¹⁵

- Graham, H. et al (2006). *Independent Review of Part-Time Higher Education Study in Wales: Final Report*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government. This report discussed the prevalence and the striking diversity of part-time study and made several recommendations for a funding and student support system. In response to the report, the WAG set aside money for part-time study, but less than the sum recommended by the second Rees Review and the Graham Review and also made some of the money conditional upon 'reconfiguration and collaboration';¹⁶
- The NIACE Dysgu Cymru Adult Participation in Learning Surveys.¹⁷

4. Key themes in adult learning in Wales¹⁸

Some themes which emerge from the strategy papers and public discussion in Wales are:

1. **Place-based regional planning based on the Wales Spatial Plan:** the Spatial Plan describes the vision of 'successful' places, which are characterised by their ability to attract and retain highly-skilled people (in highly-skilled jobs). They, in turn, attract a lower-skilled service industry around them. An important element of place-based planning is to situate higher-level (adult) education provision in areas with comparatively low levels of educational achievement. Thus, Merthyr Tydfil and Ebbw Vale are to become 'university towns' (although the precise meaning of this is unclear) and Swansea University is to collaborate with other providers in the area to develop the 'virtual University of South West Wales' – both developments geared towards developing the Heads of the Valleys area and South West Wales respectively. While the vision appears sensible, it is unclear how 'highly-skilled' people are to be persuaded to stay in areas which do not (yet) have jobs at the right level. Moreover, it is unclear how the gap between people, who often lack basic educational and other skills, and the vision of 'high-level' education opportunities is to be bridged;
2. **The twin goals of raising basic skills levels and fostering higher-level skills development:** unsurprisingly, the main focus in Welsh education policy-making is the skills/economic agenda, which is, however, seen through the prism of communities and their needs (hence the importance of the Spatial Plan). Both Welsh Assembly Governments have had to deal with the fact that some areas in Wales, particularly the Heads of the Valleys area of the former industrialised areas of South Wales, some areas in the cities of South Wales and some rural communities in South West Wales and North Wales, suffer particularly from inter-related problems of low economic activity, low education achievement, poor infrastructure, major health-related issues etc. The *Communities First* initiatives as well as the *Wales Spatial Plan* are attempts to get to grips with these problems. As a consequence, much adult learning (be that in some community-based learning initiatives or work-based learning etc.) has had to be focused on basic skills – with mixed results. The NIACE adult learner survey seems to show that those who need basic skills are still often not accessing learning provision at all, while for a

¹⁵ See <http://www.learning.wales.gov.uk/pdfs/students/mainrr-e.pdf>.

¹⁶ See <http://new.wales.gov.uk/docrepos/40382/4038232/403829/4038291/403829/graham-report-main-e.pdf?lang=en>.

¹⁷ See <http://niace.rcthosting.com/cms/media/2007-Eng.pdf>.

¹⁸ This is not an exhaustive but a suggestive list.

significant number of those accessing learning, basic skills do not seem to be necessary.

At the same time, the Welsh 'brain drain' of graduates, who often do not stay in Wales because they are more likely to find more suitable and better paid employment elsewhere, has preoccupied both Welsh Assembly Governments. Developments like setting up Technia (often built with European support) across Wales and encouraging 'knowledge exploitation' are meant to counteract this (*A Winning Wales*). However, more cautious voices like that of Grenville Jackson (former director of Strategy and Communications at ELWa) warned that the case of Welsh 'brain drain' should not be overstated (*Reversing the Brain Drain*, 2004).

3. Welsh language provision

- a. for Welsh-speakers;
- b. Welsh for Adults provision for learners.

The main strategy documents increasingly emphasize the need to develop **opportunities to learn through the medium of Welsh** at all levels of (adult) education. Despite the fact that Wales is a bilingual country, the opportunity to study through the medium of Welsh – especially in sectors like vocational education and community education in some areas of Wales – have been (and still are) lacking. It is unclear how much call there is for Welsh-medium education at all levels and in all parts of the country, but Welsh-medium provision may be an area which Wales will promote for political and cultural reasons and to slowly increase the usage of Welsh in more areas of public life. There is a wide variety of **Welsh for Adults** provision: from low-level provision, which is structured according to the pan-European ALTE levels of accreditation, FE-level provision funded by DECW, to Level 4 provision which is funded by HEFCW, and distance learning. Organisations like the Welsh Language Board, the BBC, ACEN etc. provide support. The WAG has also recognised the need for research to influence Welsh for Adults provision and has designated the South West Wales Welsh for Adults Centre based at Swansea University as the lead centre for research into Welsh for Adults. There are six Welsh for Adults Centres in Wales now which came into operation last year: Gwent (Hill College), Cardiff and the Vale (Cardiff University), Glamorgan (University of Glamorgan), South West Wales (Swansea University), Mid Wales (UCW Aberystwyth) and North Wales (UCNW Bangor).

4. **Social inclusion through widening participation at all study levels and for all age groups:** in recent years policy drives for widening participation initiatives have become increasingly concerned with lower-level provision for adults and with HE widening participation in HE for school-age students (through initiatives like *First Campus*). This does not mean that there is no widening participation into HE for adults; initiatives like *Reaching Wider*, the *Community University of the Valleys*, *Community Progression* (Swansea University) or *Progression through Partnership/Community University of the Valleys-East* have enabled numerous adults to progress to HE. However, increasingly policy steers have been for widening participation initiatives to start earlier in a prospective student's life;
5. **Link between social inclusion, community regeneration and education:** all Assembly learning and economic strategies refer to the role of education for social inclusion and community regeneration – notably in the form of early years interventions and higher-level skills development. Other adult education provision, which is linked with social inclusion and community

regeneration, is often linked with delivery in Communities First areas and is meant to foster employability (however vaguely defined) and 'wider benefits' of learning as well as raise educational aspirations for learners and their families. Widening participation targets have been increasingly linked with delivery in Communities First areas. The *Interim Evaluation report of Communities First* (2006) finds, amongst other things, that the results of education (and other) interventions are mixed and that there is a tension between co-operation vs. competition of education providers. It appears to me that only longer-term interventions have a chance of success and that education provision alone is not likely to be successful as a tool for economic/social regeneration;

6. **E-learning strategy:** *Cymru Ar-lein – Wales Online* is the WAG's e-learning strategy (2002). E-learning is deliberately linked with lifelong learning and skills development for economic development. Five key goals are essential skills development, Lifelong Learning, applying knowledge, developing skills for business, and developing learning communities. Four cross-cutting themes are equality of opportunity, sustainable development, social inclusion and bilingualism. Adult learners are not specifically mentioned but e-learning as complementing and facilitating lifelong learning is key to the strategy;
7. **Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (since 2003):** the CQFW is an attempt at bringing all forms of learning and education into one framework and thereby to provide a tool with which all kinds of learning can be officially recognised. The framework merges the concepts of volume of learning achievements (credit) and the demands made on the learner (level). The CQFW already includes FE and HE levels and qualifications, NVQs and other vocational qualifications and since September 2005 efforts are being made to include community development learning and informal learning. The CQFW links in with the European Credit and Qualifications Framework. It appears that the framework has generally been accepted by providers, even though some, e.g. some HEIs, persist in using the old terminology in internal communication. It is unclear, though, how learning which does not fall within the remits of HE and FE are going to be subsumed under the CQFW;
8. **"Evidence-based policy":** a dictum/shibboleth of the first two Assembly Governments. The fact is that a lot of what is anecdotally known to be true or what adult educators believe to be true is often not backed up by research evidence – often because that research has not been conducted or because, if evidence exists, it is often based on small-scale research with sometimes dubious methodology, as Rob Humphreys, former director of NIACE Dysgu Cymru and now Director of the Open University in Wales has pointed out on numerous occasions. The Welsh Assembly Government has argued that the sector must provide the evidence on which policy can be based (e.g. Jane Davidson's keynote address at the third UALL Cymru conference, Trinity College Carmarthen, 2004) and has, on occasion, commissioned large-scale research projects itself (Rees, 2001; Rees, 2005; Graham, 2006). It appears that recommendations were taken up by the Assembly if it was politically expedient, such as the fee settlement for full-time HE students, which was one of the recommendations of the second Rees review. Even though key recommendations of the second Rees review were not implemented, the Graham review seems to have fared worse. Beyond a paragraph in *The Learning Country – Vision into Action*, the report seems to have made little impact (although it must be noted that the money set aside for part-time study is now coming to HEIs). Community-based adult education still seems to be under-researched, and, judging by the fact that community adult

education was mentioned in the consultation document for *The Learning Country – Vision into Action* (if only in the context of providing a ‘stepping-stone’ function into other learning) but is missing from the final version of the document, the Assembly may need reminding that this is a valuable part of lifelong learning;

9. **Part-time education:** part-time education at all levels but particularly in FE and HE is important for Wales as enrolment numbers are high and, in the case of HE, higher than anywhere else in the UK. Moreover (and stating the obvious), part-time learners are, overwhelmingly, adult learners. It appears, though, that part-time education is not very high on the agenda of the Assembly Government (see my comment about the reception of the Graham Review);
10. **HE in FE and other collaborations between providers:** it appears that there is more HE provision, which is delivered by FE providers through franchise agreements in Wales, than anywhere else in the UK. Because these courses run ‘closer to home’ for many people, it is often adults who benefit most from this provision. Some FE provision (such as OCN Wales Access provision) is also taught in HEIs. The blurring of boundaries of FE and HE is characteristic of the drive of the last two Assembly Governments, which urged education providers to form partnerships (such as the Community Consortia for Education and Training [CCETs]) and to collaborate to avoid duplication of provision. Some of the partnerships appear to work well even though increased partnership working always comes with an increased workload and collaboration vs. competition issues for the partners involved. Furthermore, some money was set aside for ‘reconfiguration and collaboration’ projects, which has resulted in several (failed) attempts to merge institutions. Recent successful mergers were those between the University of Glamorgan and Merthyr College and between Cardiff University and the Royal Welsh College of Medicine.

Additionally, Learning Networks, such as the Neath Port Talbot New Learning Network, RISE (covering Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Monmouthshire, Caerphilly and Newport), Carmarthenshire Learning Network and lifelong learning projects like the Community University of the Valleys (Swansea and South West Wales) and the Community University of the Valleys-East (incorporating *Progression for Partnership*, a collaboration project between the WEA South Wales, the University of Wales, Newport and the University of Glamorgan) are collaborative projects across the boundaries of community education, FE and HE.

11. **The drive to involve employers is yielding mixed results:** employer support for learning tends to be focused on work-based learning and even here support is mixed (anecdotal evidence suggests that SMEs are often not very supportive). Training/education providers find it difficult to persuade employers to support learners to do all parts of a qualification (such as an NVQ) rather than the parts which are of immediate use to specific work situations. Support for higher-level learning is available in some sectors but, anecdotally, employees are often reluctant to ask for (financial and other) support, especially if they are in fixed-term or part-time employment.
12. **An emerging strategy for older people?** The – insofar as adults are concerned – remarkably content-free *Learning Country – Vision into Action* mentions “[e]nsuring that adults and older people can benefit from lifelong learning longer through our Strategy for Older People”, which, amongst

other things is mean to enable older people to be “economically active for longer”. It is to be seen whether concrete policy will follow.

13. **International involvement in policy-making:** Jane Davidson, the former Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, was the Vice President of EARLALL (European Association of Regional and Local Authorities on Lifelong Learning). At this moment, it is unclear whether Jane Hutt has taken up this post.

Annex A

Table 1: Numbers of learners at Further Education Institutions, LEA Community Learning or Work-based Learning providers by age and gender, 2005/06

Age	Men		Women		Persons	
	1st December	All Year	1st December	All Year	1st December	All Year
under 16 - 19	31435	39915	27385	35065	58815	74975
20-24	10690	16420	12700	19175	23390	35595
25-49	28320	48825	54195	81255	82515	130080
50-64	9880	16290	21320	30970	31200	47260
65+	5070	7090	9095	12035	14165	19120
not specified	735	1515	1345	2595	2075	4110
<i>Total</i>	86130	130055	126040	181095	212160	311140

Tables 2-4: HE enrolments by mode of study, age group, level of study and gender, 2004/05

Postgraduate	Full-time		Part-time	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Under 16	0	0	0	0
16-18	0	0	0	*
19-20	42	38	*	*
21-24	2372	2692	680	902
25-39	2183	1805	3458	3880
40-59	331	309	2195	2900
60+	9	17	221	186
<i>Total</i>	4937	4861	6554	7868

First degree	Full-time		Part-time	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Under 16	0	0	0	0
16-18	4177	5759	14	22
19-20	11587	14770	117	128
21-24	7078	7333	539	522
25-39	2433	3882	1516	2250
40-59	529	1124	1061	1914
60+	29	41	189	188
<i>Total</i>	25833	32909	3436	5024

Other Undergraduate	Full-time		Part-time	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Under 16	0	0	14	10
16-18	361	255	1551	1727
19-20	979	713	897	663
21-24	746	577	1594	2166
25-39	481	630	4429	7321
40-59	112	218	4126	7678
60+	*	5	1581	2266
<i>Total</i>	2679	2398	14192	21831

Further extracts from the NIACE Dysgu Cymru Adult Participation Survey:

- Attitudes towards learning appear to be more positive. The proportion of adults who say that they are likely to engage in learning in the future has increased from 38% in 2002, 43% in 2003% to 47% in 2007. Conversely, the number of adults who consider themselves to be unlikely to participate in future learning has fallen (2002: 58%; 2003: 54%; 2007: 50%);
- Current participation rates impact on future intentions to learn (85% if current learners report that they are likely to take up learning in the future, compared with 18% of those who have not participated since leaving full-time education);
- Motivations for learning vary: 59% of learners cite employment-related reasons, 59% personal development reasons, 22% education/progression reasons, 10% were undertaking compulsory training;
- The following benefits of learning were identified: "I have developed as a person" (30%); "I have met new people/made new friends" (21%); "My self-confidence has improved" (20%); "I have got/expect to get a recognised qualification" (19%); "I have got/expect to get a job" (14%);
- The following main factors preventing learning were identified: "Work/other time pressures" (21% in 2002; 21% in 2003%; 22% in 2007); "I feel I am too old" (15% in 2002; 20% in 2002; 29% in 2007); "Not interested/don't want to" (26% in 2002; 13% in 2003%; 17% in 2007); "I feel no need to learn any more" (10% in 2002; 8% in 2003; 13% in 2007); "Cost/money/can't afford it" (7% in 2002; 4% in 2003; 10% in 2007); "Childcare arrangements/caring for others" (8% in 2002; 8% in 2003; 6% in 2007).

Table 5: Proportion of adults without qualifications and adults with higher-level qualifications by unitary authority (based on Census Figures)¹⁹

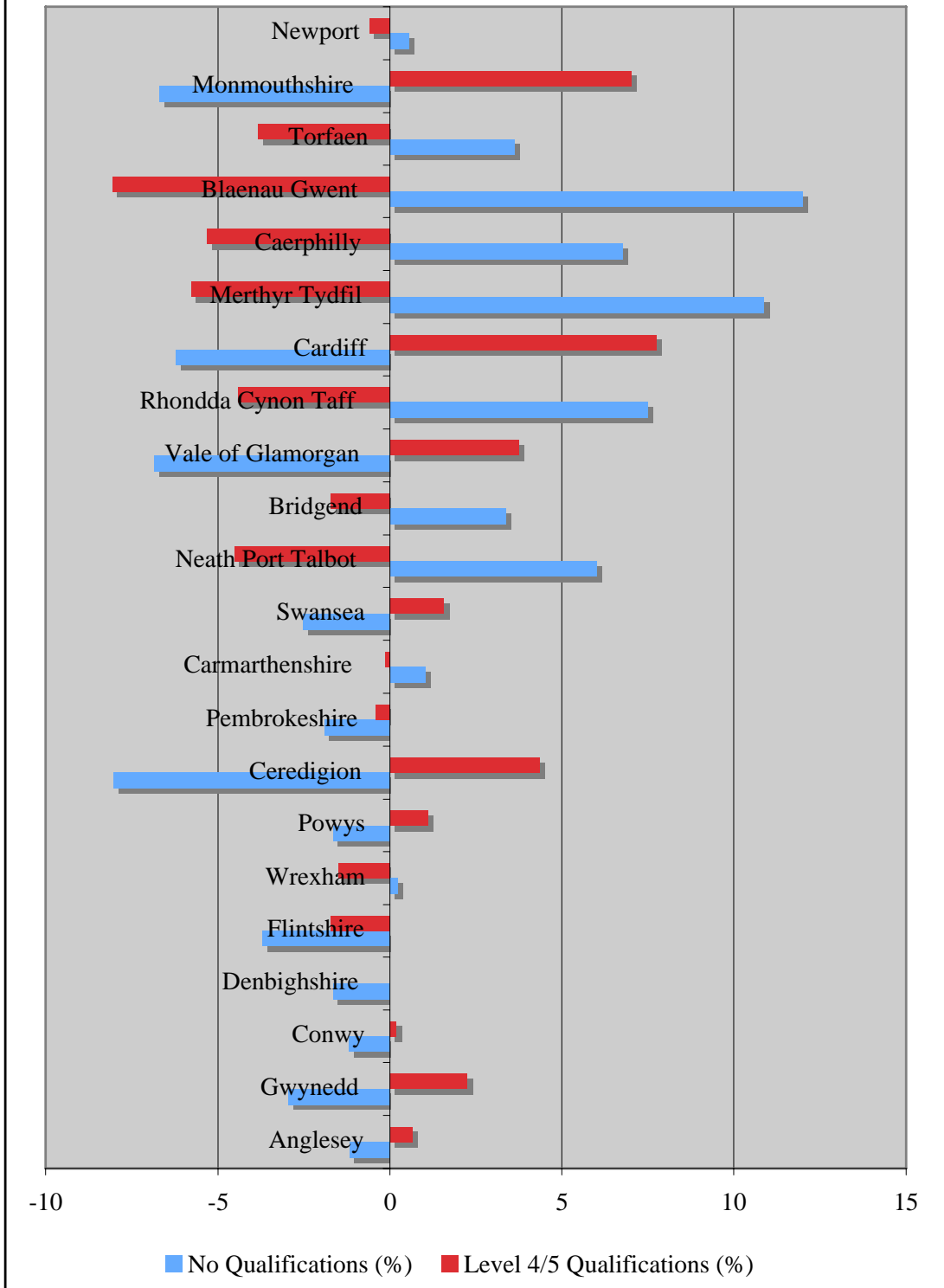
	No Qualifications in %	Level 4/5 Qualifications in %
Wales	33.02%	17.39%
Anglesey	31.85% (-1.17%)	18.04% (+0.65%)
Gwynedd	30.07% (-2.95%)	19.63% (+2.24%)
Conwy	31.83% (-1.19%)	17.58% (+0.19)
Denbighshire	31.36% (-1.66%)	17.39% (0%)
Flintshire	29.31% (-3.71%)	15.66% (-1.73%)
Wrexham	33.25% (+0.23%)	15.9% (-1.49%)
Powys	31.36% (-1.66%)	18.49% (+1.1%)
Ceredigion	24.99% (-8.03%)	21.74% (+4.35%)
Pembrokeshire	31.11% (-1.91%)	16.99% (-0.4%)
Carmarthenshire	34.04% (+1.02%)	17.24% (-0.15%)
Swansea	30.51% (-2.51%)	18.95% (+1.56%)
Neath Port Talbot	39.04% (+6.02%)	12.86% (-4.53%)
Bridgend	36.4% (+3.38%)	15.68% (-1.71%)
Vale of Glamorgan	26.18% (-6.84%)	21.14% (+3.75%)
Rhondda Cynon Taff	40.51% (+7.49%)	12.97% (-4.42%)
Cardiff	26.8% (-6.22%)	25.15% (+7.76%)
Merthyr Tydfil	43.9% (+10.88%)	11.62% (-5.77%)
Caerphilly	39.78% (+6.76%)	12.09% (-5.3%)
Blaenau Gwent	45.02% (+12%)	9.33% (-8.06%)
Torfaen	36.65% (+3.63%)	13.56% (-3.83%)
Monmouthshire	26.34% (-6.68%)	24.41% (+7.02%)
Newport	33.58% (+0.56%)	16.8% (-0.59%)

Note: the percentage in brackets is the difference between the Welsh average and the percentage for one unitary authority. A positive figure means that the percentage for the unitary authority exceeds the Welsh average; a negative figure means that the percentage for the unitary authority is below that of the Welsh average. Example: Blaenau Gwent has an exceptionally high proportion of people without qualifications (exceeding the Welsh average by 12%) and also has low numbers of highly qualified people (lower than the Welsh average by 8.06%).

Also see illustration overleaf.

¹⁹ Source: National Statistics, 2007.

**No/higher level qualifications by unitary authority
(differences from the Welsh average)**



Annex B

Acen	Webservice for learners of Welsh (“acen” = <i>accent</i> in Welsh)
ALG	Assembly Learning Grant
CCET	Community Consortia for Education and Training
DECWL	Department for Education, Culture and Welsh Language (third Assembly Government)
DELLS	Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (second Assembly Governments)
Dysg	‘Think tank’ whose remit covers all forms of education except HE; now incorporated into the Welsh Assembly [“dysg” = <i>learning, erudition</i> in Welsh]
ELWa	Education, Learning Wales (funding body for FE and other learning except HE; now incorporated into the Welsh Assembly)
Estyn	The Office of Her Majesty’s Inspector of Education and Training in Wales [“estyn” = <i>to advance, extend</i> in Welsh]
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
NIACE Dysgu Cymru	NIACE in Wales
WAG	Welsh Assembly Government