

Transforming Education and Training Provision for Wales

The Strategic Outline Programme for the Regional Learning Partnership South West Wales

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The Strategic Outline Programme

Proposers:

Regional Learning Partnership South West Wales (RLPSWW) (see *Annex 1* for list of partners).

The concept of a Regional Learning Partnership for South West Wales was established back in September 2007. It was both a direct response to a number of strategies and reviews emerging from the Welsh Assembly Government, which identified a need for collaborative working to improve effectiveness and efficiencies of public services. Equally, the timing of the partnership coming together reflected the maturity of local learning networks in the region and the benefits foreseen in working across boundaries. The partners engaged in the project from Higher Education to Further Education, from Third Sector to Work Based Learning from Local Government to Careers Wales West, all supported the need for a regional perspective which would respond to the Making the Connections strategy outlining efficiencies and service improvements in the area of skills and learning, while improving the engagement of citizens (in this sense “learners”) across the region. References to duplication of provision and unnecessary boundaries experienced by the learner were cited by partners in the initial regional Workshop. The focus of the learner at the centre of strategic provision was recognised as key.

The RLP was established in the further context of European Convergence funding and a recognition that this final round of European intervention required more joined up approaches. It was seen that the Regional Learning Partnership had the potential to provide a vehicle for collaborative planning, based on local need and with local delivery.

Subsequently, the partners acknowledged the need to be even more ambitious in the design of the RLPSWW. The impact of bringing together economic development and regeneration partners with education and skills partners in one group was seen to have significant benefits for the regional economy.

Since then, over 50 partner organisations from across the south west Wales region have been involved in taking the concept forward. During this time, the RLP Steering Group has been established and has consulted widely across all post 14 learning providers. Also, a smaller Strategy Group has been set up to provide policy direction for the partnership. Both Groups are representative of sectors and geography of the region. DCELLS have regularly supported both the Steering and Strategy groups.

The Regional Learning Partnership has established organisational structures and meeting arrangements and has been meeting for almost two years.

Geographic Area or Sector:

The Regional Learning Partnership South West Wales
"Regional Strategic Planning – Local Delivery"

Area: south west Wales: Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion and Swansea.

Sectors: Further Education, Higher Education, Local Government (Adult & Community Learning and Regeneration), Work Based Learning, Private and Third Sector

Participating Stakeholders and Providers:

See Annex 1 for a list of partners and stakeholders with whom the RLP has engaged, including those who have made a commitment to the resourcing of the RLP

The Strategic Review. This should provide a rationale for the elements of education and training provision to be addressed in the proposal and the desired goals, outcomes and outputs.

a) ***Rationale*** for the proposal, which should summarise the evidence base for the strategic direction of change being proposed

The Regional Learning Partnership has already achieved a significant amount of relationship building and trust between partners since its inception in September 2007.

In the south west Wales Region there are a broad range of providers offering post-14 education and learning opportunities including:

5 Local Authorities

7 Further Education Institutions

5 County Voluntary Councils

5 Higher Education institutions

Private training providers

Local & community based organisations

Plus other learning providers who are based outside but who reach into the region

ESTYN, WAG, WEFO, together with the partners have identified duplication and potential efficiencies through collaborative working.

The rationale for the RLP is to increase efficiencies across the Partnership and avoid duplication.

The RLP is not an additional layer of bureaucracy in the learning and skills arena. The RLP adds value to local delivery.

There is a strategic context to the RLP's development in response to the Webbe Review and Making the Connections (which are further developed in Annex 2). The RLP has bid for Convergence Funding under Priority 4 'Making the Connections' and specifically aims to address the following:

Public Engagement: every person to have the opportunity to contribute and connect with the hardest to reach

Citizens at the Centre: services more responsive to users with people & communities involved in designing the way services are delivered

Working together as the Welsh Public Service: more co-ordination between providers to deliver sustainable, quality and responsive services.

Value for Money: making the most of our resources.

The RLP is going in the right direction and is making strides towards meeting the above agendas, as positive meetings with Dr Dennis Gunning (February 2008) and John Griffiths A.M. (May 2009) and since December 2008 Dr Sonia Reynolds have proven.

The RLPSWW presents itself as the partnership which will provide a regional strategic steer for transformational change in the south west Wales region. This change will include brokering appropriate partnership work to the benefit of the learner.

This partnership will provide a **regional strategic approach**, based on a shared vision and planning, whilst retaining **local delivery**. For example: the RLP's composite response to the DCELLS ACL review, which highlighted the benefits to the learner of regional strategic planning, such as increased Welsh medium provision, sharing good practise and improving learning opportunities in rural areas.

The RLP Action Plan (Annex 3) is in direct response to the evidence base provided by the partners themselves via the Strategy and Steering Groups. Annex 4 provides detail of the RLP Workshop held in February 2008 which highlights the evidence base. For example

“WBL provider network, as specialists in vocational learning, are adept in developing, steering and maintaining effective vocational training programmes and opportunities. In the SW region alone, we have established and long standing links with over 3,000 employers, ranging from SMEs to national and international companies. This allows us to tailor support to their needs and potentially canvas their views, for the partnership. We also have links with Government agencies e.g. Careers Wales, Job Centre Plus etc. The partnership will allow us to reduce unnecessary duplication, provide opportunities to further develop areas of speciality (within a regional framework) and engage with other organisations to remove obstacles to learning. By utilising the strengths of various sectors in the partnership, we will all have a greater reach and influence, allowing us to access funding bids to meet the learners, employers and regional needs more efficiently and effectively.”

Please refer to the third annex in the RLP Workshop report (Annex 4) for detailed evidence.

The RLP has identified the following improvements:

- Strengthen strategic management, which will benefit the learner and the potential learner, by offering increased learning opportunities;
- Improve efficiency through integration of services and elimination of duplication which will benefit the learner and the potential learner by freeing up resources;
- Better meet current and future demand for relevant high quality education & training delivery, which will benefit the learner by being more responsive;
- Establish a consistent quality framework for delivery across the region which will benefit the learner by raising the quality of learning across the region;
- Maintain a flexible and responsive approach to the needs of the local labour market by bringing learning and skills together with regeneration opportunities in the region, which will benefit the learner by delivering relevant learning opportunities with greater potential for employment;
- Be underpinned by timely and relevant economic data (via the regional learning and skills observatory) ensuring the most appropriate learning opportunities and progression routes are available for learners in the region, which will benefit the learner by providing learner pathways.

The Partnership aims ultimately to inform the restructuring of provision of publicly funded training and education in the region.

Strategic Outline Programme submissions, which have been submitted locally, have been brought to the RLPSWW 'table' for dissemination and discussion. The RLP sees the benefit of sharing good practise. For example, reviewing governance principles across the partnership whereby partners share what they are doing to meet local needs. These include the following proposals:

- Carmarthenshire Project
- Ceredigion Learning Partnership
- Gorseinon & Swansea College merger
- Neath Port Talbot College WBL
- Neath Port Talbot Learning Partnership
- Pembrokeshire CC Project
- Pembrokeshire FEI WBL Project
- Swansea Learning Partnership
- Swansea Metropolitan University Project
- Trinity College Carmarthenshire
- WEA North/South

Achievements of the RLPSWW since its inception in late 2007 are set out in

Annex 5

b) Impact on local labour market demand.

The RLP will not be a direct provider of learning. Its role is not in meeting local labour market needs. It is looking to focus the work of a number of organisations through the Regional Learning and Skills Observatory. This has not happened before. Details of the RLSO can be found at Annex 6.

The RLPSWW partners, both education and regeneration, identified early on the need for a regional learning & skills observatory (RLSO) that would inform delivery of provision across the region. A cross-sector Task & Finish group has been established that has explored the opportunities of a RLSO and identified the following Goals and Objectives:

Goals	Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve the collection and sharing of key data and intelligence concerning learning, skills and the labour market in South West Wales. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To establish a comprehensive and up to date collection of data and information about SW Wales’ current labour market and future projections. • To ensure that all information contained in the Observatory will be accurate (quality-assured) and contain appropriate guidelines for users on accuracy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve the scope and coverage of key data and intelligence concerning learning, skills and the labour market in South West Wales. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify and then conduct research to fill data gaps.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve access to key data and intelligence concerning learning, skills and the labour market in South West Wales. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To disseminate and widen access to intelligence using publications and a website.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To model progression routes to up-skilling and employment for learners and potential learners in South West Wales. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To use the RLSO’s LMI output as a tool to influence curriculum development.

The establishment of a regional learning and skills observatory - complementing the national model - will provide partners in the RLPSWW with relevant and timely information, particularly important in the current economic

climate. This will make the RLPSWW a responsive partnership with analysis of provision to reduce duplication and identify gaps.

*c) **Proposals should clearly identify learner outputs and outcomes that will arise from the proposed transformation model This should include a summary of the expected impact of the proposed changes on rates of participation; quality of delivery; and learner attainment and progression.***

The RLPSWW model aims to reduce inefficiencies and build on best practice within and beyond the region, with a commitment from the partners that the model will "put the needs of the learners first by working together". With the specific learner orientated outcomes detailed below we would anticipate:

- **Improved rates of participation** as the RLSO provides detailed local and regional information on needs of learners and gaps in provision eg. this will enable providers to target provision to meet the specific needs of employers;
- **Improved quality of delivery** as partners share good practise and ultimately resources, working together to raise the quality of delivery in the region eg. Neath Port Talbot's New Learning Network model.
- **Improved learner attainment**, a better understanding of other providers & provision in the region allowing for partners to work together more effectively to ensure provision is learner centred and appropriate eg. increasing Welsh Medium provision;
- **Improved learner progression** as the RLSO identifies progression pathways throughout the region, between providers, leading to specific attainment outcomes eg. specific learning pathways for potential learners.

Essentially, the RLP will generate outputs to the benefit of providers which will **impact** on learner outcomes. Specific examples include:

- A Regional Learning Portal. A collaborative approach between providers to enable learners to identify opportunities available in the region, enrol and progress between providers.
- Proactive and holistic progression for learners. Through research from the Regional Learning & Skills Observatory, clear routes for progression identified for the learner, regardless of provider, gaps identified and funded, with strong cross sector and local employer links.
- Development of regional curriculum planning to develop opportunities, which are relevant to regional economy & employers needs, including opportunities for specialisation (e.g. expanding & developing Welsh language provision) through network reconfiguration.
- A broader regional view for providers which will break through traditional boundaries, both geographical and cross sector, and consequently improve opportunities for learners
- A clear Quality Framework for all providers and learners.
- Increased % of funding for post-14 learning in the region to be flowing directly to the region's learners.

This should lead to improved rates of participation, improved quality of delivery by sharing of best practice

The Geographic/Sectoral Transformation Strategy, outlining the steps the Learning Partnership wish to take to secure the agreed deliverables

The RLP has developed an Action Plan to support the implementation of the Partnership's vision, mission statement and remit (see Annex 7). The Action Plan includes 3 "key pillars" of activity:

- (i) Regional Learning and Skills Observatory
- (ii) E-Learning Portal
- (iii) Partnership Development/ Brokerage

Steps:

1. Clarify governance arrangements for the RLP itself which will allow this unique partnership to operate on a more formal basis (Key Pillar 3). Some of these considerations will need to be resolved: ongoing financial contributions; scrutiny arrangements and democratic accountability; the minefield of legal obligations across various bodies.
2. Secure funding for RLPSWW Service Team (Key Pillar 3)
3. Establish Regional Learning and Skills Observatory to inform strategic planning and delivery (Key Pillar 1)
4. Detailed audit of learning opportunities in Region with assessment of reconfiguration (Key Pillar 1)
5. Negotiation with partners for revised provision (Key Pillar 3)

See Action Plan at Annex 3 for more detail. It should be noted that the RLP Action Plan is a working and evolving document which is regularly being reviewed and developed with input from all partners

One example of key developments arising from the establishment of the Regional Learning Partnership is the establishment of a Task & Finish Group comprising the Vice Chancellors/ Principals of the Higher Education institutions in the region, together with FE Principals (and other sector representatives) with a view to identifying and mapping areas for joint working and transformation across the region between these two key sectors to the benefit of the learner. This Group is chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive of Carmarthenshire County Council/ Chair of the RLP Strategy Group.

In the Autumn 2009, the RLP will do a specific piece of analysis of the SOP submissions in the context of strategic linkages and the added value of the RLP itself, as well as sharing good practise.

Expected timeframe for each delivery step and to complete the transformation programme

The Action Plan details 3 phases of delivery: 12 months, 2 years and 5 years. See Annex 3 for a copy of the Action Plan

Highlights include:

Key Pillar (1): RLSO

- Establish RLSO to inform strategy and delivery: pilot – September 2009 (subject to funding being secured)
- Detailed audit of learning opportunities in Region - September 2010
- Broaden coverage of RLSO to whole region – September 2010

Key Pillar (2): e-Learning Portal

- A cross sector group to develop a plan for the portal – September 2009.

Key Pillar (3): Partnership Development /Brokerage

- Agree governance arrangements, including completion of financial contribution review – December 2009
- Secure funding for RLPSWW Service Team – December 2009
- Progress with the RLP ACL Task & Finish Group, the regional ACL transformation, including adding value in:
 - Sharing of expertise in a variety of areas including quality, curriculum, bilingualism, learner support etc
 - Sharing of capacity
 - Building on existing networks and good practise
 - Continual Professional Development of staff
 - Progression pathways for learners across the RLP sectors (and cross border)
 - Shared examination of funding issues leading to joint business planning exercises
- Detailed assessment of potential reconfiguration – June 2011
- Negotiation with partners for revised provision – September 2011
- Implementation September 2012
- Scope specific actions for the RLP HE/FE Task & Finish Group
- Develop regional learner engagement strategy and tool kit with the RLP Learner Engagement & Task & Finish Group

Proposed sources of funding

The RLPSWW has secured a financial commitment of £5k per institution (£7.5k from the Local Authorities, split between Education and Regeneration Directors) for 2009/10. This amounts to over £100k.

The RLPSWW has submitted an Expression of Interest under the Convergence programme and has been invited to submit a Business Plan, which it is anticipated will be sent in draft to WEFO by the end of July 2009 (ESF – Priority 4). The project fits specifically with the 'Modernising and

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Improving the Quality of our Public Services’ strategic framework and will deliver towards a number of the indicative activities.

The RLPSWW has submitted a Project Initiation Document to the Western Valleys Strategic Regeneration Area to run a pilot of the RLSO in the Western Valleys.

The RLPSWW seeks funding support from the DCELLS Transformation Fund of at least £30k to meet the “gap” in funding in the Convergence Business Plan (2009/10 – 2012/13), with a particular focus on governance.

It should be noted that the RLP will continue to develop but the pace of transformation will be considerably slower, without DCELLS support and Structural Funds intervention.

PARTNERSHIP ENGAGEMENT TO DATE

Members of the Partnership are highlighted in "bold"

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Carmarthenshire County Council
Ceredigion County Borough Council
Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Pembrokeshire County Council
City and County of Swansea

3RD SECTOR

Carmarthenshire Association for Voluntary Services
Ceredigion Association for Voluntary Services
Neath Port Talbot Council for Voluntary Service
Pembrokeshire Association for Voluntary Services
Swansea Council for Voluntary Service
Workers' Educational Association South Wales

FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR

Coleg Ceredigion
Coleg Sir Gar
Gorseinon College
Neath Port Talbot College
Pembrokeshire College
Swansea College

HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

Aberystwyth University
Lampeter University
Swansea University
Swansea Metropolitan University
Trinity University College, Carmarthen.
West and Mid Wales Widening Access Partnership

PRIVATE SECTOR

National Training Federation Wales (NTFW)
West Wales Chamber of Commerce

REGIONAL/NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Careers Wales West
Cornwall Learning Partnership
Jobcentre Plus
LLUK
Marchmont Skills Observatory (south west England)
NIACE Dysgu Cymru
South West and Mid Wales Consortium (swamwac)
Wales European Funding Office (WEFO)
Welsh Assembly Government: Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning & Skills (DCELLS, WAG)
Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)

DEVELOPMENT OF THE RLPSWW IN A STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The Regional Learning Partnership South West Wales provides a coherent and tangible response to the strategic direction set by the Welsh Assembly Government, and specifically DCELLS, referenced as follows:

WAG's Strategy Document: Skills That Work for Wales – A Skills and Employment Strategy and Action Plan, July 2008, states that:

"Most learning providers in Wales are good and a number are excellent. However, the Webb Review concluded that we need to reform the system to encourage more collaborative working, to promote more choice and personalisation for learners, and to drive efficiencies in the learning network." (para.5, page 3).

The Regional Learning Partnership's fundamental premise is to fulfil the Making the Connections strategy and improve services to its citizens (i.e. the learner) and be part of the WAG Transformation of learning in Wales agenda by bringing partners together across south west Wales and facilitate knowledge transfer and add value through collaborative working (key pillar 3 of the RLP Action Plan).

"Although the performance of our learning network is improving, and there are numerous examples of excellence, we need to spread best practice from the best-performing providers to those that are still catching up. Only a network of high-quality providers, working in collaboration, can deliver our goals of improved choice and opportunity for learners" (para.27, page 7).

The Regional Learning Partnership provides a practical and tangible means of fulfilling this approach by bringing all the main sectors and stakeholders together in the south west Wales region (key pillar 3 of the RLP Action Plan).

"We will continue to produce a regular analysis of learning and skills needs. National strategic priorities do not change quickly and the provider network may need time to respond to new challenges, so we will publish a National Learning and Skills Assessment (NLSA) on a 4-year cycle, with annual updates. The assessment will highlight a limited number of national learning and skills priorities that learning providers need to address. These priorities will directly inform our future fees policy," (para.9.13, page 70)

"The Assembly Government will continue to play the lead role in coordinating and disseminating labour market intelligence (LMI) in Wales, working closely with Sector Skills Councils, Jobcentre Plus and Spatial Plan Area Groups. We have created the Learning and Skills Observatory as a single gateway to research and analysis of education, learning, skills and labour market information in Wales," (Para. 9.15, page 70)

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The Regional Learning and Skills Observatory (key pillar 1 of the RLP Action Plan) will provide a similar and wholly complementary role at a local and regional level, whereby providers and strategic planners will be informed by timely, accessible locally gathered labour market intelligence brought together across sectors and stakeholders.

Delivering Skills That Work for Wales – A New Approach to Adult Community Learning, September 2008 consultation document states that:

“The adult community learning policy reflects the aim of Making the Connections, which is to ensure that public services work in a more joined-up way to deliver effective services for citizens. Adult community learning can and should have strong links with a wide range of other Welsh Assembly Government strategies and initiatives beyond community development. It has a key role to play in contributing to policy priorities such as social inclusion and health and wellbeing. We will support opportunities to focus on and develop this role in a more structured and strategic manner.” (section 5, page 5).

The Regional Learning Partnership brings together the providers and key stakeholders engaged in learning across south west Wales to ensure that we work together through a more collaborative way – Key pillar 3 of the RLP Action Plan.

“We recognise the need to support opportunities for progression by learners into other forms of learning or, where relevant, into employment. The Adult Community Learning Partnerships will have a key role to play in supporting such progression by providing more joined-up approaches to delivery and providing opportunities to move into more mainstream or advanced provision, where appropriate” (Section 3, page 4).

The RLPSWW has responded to the DCELLS invitation to its ACL Transformation policy and submitted a composite Strategic Outline Programme which brings together the 5 county ACL local network submissions (see Annex 5). The added value of the RLPSWW is highlighted in this response.

RLPSWW ACTION PLAN

See separate document

RLPSWW WORKSHOP REPORT (FEBRUARY 2008)

See separate document

IDENTIFIED ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE RLP TO DATE

- Two full partnership/stakeholder meetings, plus ongoing wider engagement throughout the year.
- Establishment of cross-sector task and finish groups for specific pieces of work, currently in progress:
 - Regional Learning & Skills Observatory Task & Finish Group
 - Regional e-learning portal Task & Finish Group
 - Learner Engagement Task & Finish Group
 - Governance Task & Finish Group
 - Higher Education/ Further Education Task & Finish Group
 - Adult & Community Learning Task & Finish Group
- Collaborative submission of 5 ACL Transformation SOPs under the umbrella of the RLP
- Successful EOI under Priority 4 of convergence, Business Planning in progress (with a view to submitting the first draft at the end of July 2009)
- First RLP coordinated and hosted workshop held in June 2009, on the theme of procurement. Confirmed by the Steering Group and participants as successful and many requests from partners to develop these opportunities further (evaluation of the RLP Procurement Workshop at Annex 4)
- Visit to Cornwall Learning Partnership of representatives from the RLP Strategy Group.
- Securing of match funding from partners for 2009 – with a total fund of circa £100k
- Provided a forum for discussion between partners of project proposals which have then progressed onto partnership projects e.g. Engage, Big Lottery lifeskills etc.,

**REGIONAL LEARNING & SKILLS OBSERVATORY
TASK & FINISH GROUP REPORT**

See separate document

Vision

'A Region where equality of opportunity and access to high quality learning opportunities are guaranteed'

Mission Statement

The Regional Learning Partnership South West Wales will achieve its vision by:

- ◆ putting the needs of learners first by working together;
- ◆ transforming the way learners access learning opportunities;
- ◆ increasing the skills levels of learners in the region for the benefit of the economy;
- ◆ providing high quality and accessible learning opportunities for all in support of personal aspirations;
- ◆ providing creative and innovative solutions to learning and
- ◆ promoting learning as part of our cultural, bi-lingual and social heritage.

Remit

The remit for the partnership is to ensure publicly funded ¹learning providers and associated organisations work collaboratively, effectively and efficiently to meet the demand needs of learners, the regional economy and society in South West Wales.

Focussing on all age learning from 14 years upwards, the partnership will:

- Develop a Strategic Planning Framework for all education and training reflecting the needs of the region, government priorities and local delivery solutions;
- Undertake research to identify training needs and solutions for a vibrant knowledge economy;
- Facilitate collaboration between providers and agencies in order to optimise the utilisation of resources;
- Utilise Convergence and potentially Trans-national Funding as a driver for change and as means of adding value to core provision;
- Focus on quality, efficiency and effectiveness;
- Develop strategies and operation systems to underpin the operation of EU funded projects;

¹ Publicly funded in this context includes all activities supported directly or indirectly from central, local and assembly government, EU, Lottery and charitable sources

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- Ensure that there is capacity to influence and to provide a regional response to Welsh Assembly Government initiatives;
- Achieve equality of opportunity for learners in a bilingual environment;
- Ensure that there is appropriate opportunity for progression at all levels including informal learning through to Higher Education.
- Connect and fit with Community Strategies linking with Economic Regeneration, Health and Wellbeing and Environment Strategies to progress and develop the Learning Agenda through a wider sphere.

These aims will be achieved by:

- Establishing, or linking in with current groups/networks, Task & Finish work groups, project teams and longer term Operational groups in, for example:
 - Strategic Planning
 - 14-19 Learning Pathways
 - Adult & Community Learning
 - Skills & Workforce Development including SSC liaison
 - Bilingual and Welsh Medium Provision
 - Quality
 - Project administration
 - Research & dissemination
- Sharing information and the dissemination of good practice through common staff development activities;
- Sharing evaluation methodologies and quality systems and
- Joint marketing and publicity initiatives;
- The development and delivery of regional, strategic, EU funded projects delivered locally and collaboratively by appropriate partnership teams operating within a contractual agreement with the lead partner.

Over time and with further development, the Partnership will aim to inform the restructuring and commissioning of provision of publicly funded training and education across South West Wales.